



THOMAS COOPER  
the Chartist  
(1805-1892)

By  
ROBERT J. CONKLIN

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## PREFACE

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Recent readers of Charles Kingsley's novel *Alton Locke* may recall its various references to Thomas Cooper. It was while engaged upon a study of this pseudo-biography of a workman-poet, a novel which Professor Cazamian has shown is based in no small degree upon incidents of Thomas Cooper's life, that I first came upon the name of the Chartist prisoner and poet. At that time I could find nothing about him except half-column notices in encyclopedias, tantalizingly brief mention of his writings in some of the larger histories of literature, and the short sketch by Ramsay MacDonald in the Dictionary of National Biography. Subsequently I discovered the early brief thesis, *Kingsley et Cooper*, of Professor Louis Cazamian; and finally the *Life of Thomas Cooper Written by Himself*, which, though it contains much interesting material about its subject, I found was by no means completely satisfying. For instance, although Cooper there traces his religious development in great detail, beginning with his youthful conversion and ending with a description of his itinerant evangelistic work, he is content to pass over his connection with the Chartist movement in a few brief paragraphs. Furthermore, aside from describing his difficulties in finding a publisher for his long poem the *Purgatory of Suicides*, he has little or nothing to say about the numerous literary productions which poured from his pen. Again, the autobiography ends twenty years before the death of its author, omitting a period during which he was twice awarded grants from the Civil List. Plainly there was still work to be done by a biographer.

Encouraged by Professor Ashley Horace Thorndike—for whose interest, assistance, and inspiration I can never be sufficiently grateful—I began a search for unpublished supplementary materials. They proved to be surprisingly

abundant, both in this country and in England. The British Museum newspaper repository at Hendon with its files of 1830 Lincoln and 1840 Leicester and Hanley newspapers —to say nothing of the *Northern Star*, the *English Chartist Circular*, and Cooper's *Midland Counties Illuminator* complete—provided a treasure house. A visit to Lincoln revealed also that the elderly couple who had lived with Cooper as servants at the time of his death, and in whose care he had left all his private papers, were still living. These papers, together with original manuscripts and early publications, which are still preserved in the library of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church in Lincoln, have been freely placed at my disposal for use in connection with this work, in which a complete study of Cooper is presented for the first time.

It must be admitted that in purely literary history Cooper will never be accorded more than a footnote, for although he has to his credit four volumes of verse, three novels, a collection of realistic sketches, and an autobiography, none of these productions can be regarded as of great importance judged simply as literature. Despite this fact, Cooper's publications possess sufficient variety, originality, and competence to be entitled to consideration upon their merits; and his work has the added significance of standing at the beginning of the literature by and for the proletariat which has increased so vastly in scope and importance since his day.

During his life-time Cooper came into contact with many of his more famous contemporaries. Thomas Noon Talfourd, Douglas Jerrold, John Forster, Bulwer-Lytton, Kingsley, Carlyle, and Disraeli he met on terms of some intimacy, and he was acquainted also with Wordsworth, DeQuincey and Emerson. On all of these authors Cooper casts some interesting side lights. Amongst the prominent radicals and liberals of his time he knew T. S. Duncombe, Feargus O'Connor, W. J. Fox, W. E. Forster, and Mazzini; and his impressions of these men are of interest to all students of the nineteenth century.

Cooper has a claim to remembrance also because of his enthusiasm for education. In all of his periodicals and from a hundred platforms he fought for a program of national free instruction. Despite his limited formal schooling he acquired a surprisingly wide knowledge of history, philosophy, and literature, and his knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, German, and Hebrew surpassed that of all but the exceptional university man. As a lecturer, Cooper was immensely popular both in London and in the industrial towns of the North. As early as 1841 he was talking to Chartists about Shakespeare and Milton, Shelley [of whom he was one of the early champions] and Byron; and his later lectures upon English history, philosophy, music, and literature introduced to the working-class an intellectual and cultural heritage of which up to this time they had scarcely suspected the existence. In 1841, too, he established in Leicester an adult school for working men, which was highly successful until it was broken up by the starvation and unemployment of the following year. An English educator has declared recently that Cooper's best monument is the program of adult education now successfully established in Lancashire and elsewhere.

In the warfare between science and religion Cooper served valiantly on both sides, beginning as a free-thinker fighting shoulder to shoulder with W. J. Fox and George Jacob Holyoake, and ending [since, like many another Victorian, he found it impossible to remain permanently in the ranks of doubt] as a traveling Baptist evangelist, whose little works on Christian Evidences sold more than fifty thousand copies. Although he accepted the theory of the geological evolution of the earth, he was sufficiently a child of his time to reject the new teachings of Darwin; yet in his references to that eminent scientist he was nevertheless always respectful, and scrupulously fair. Cooper's strict sense of duty, and his faith in the infallibility of conscience, explain his frequent complete reversals of opinion.

His active participation in the fight for manhood suffrage and democratic government; his early and outspoken attacks upon the policy of *laissez-faire*; and his whole-hearted [if brief] incursion into pacifism further link him to movements which since his day have become of increasing strength and importance.

The writer wishes to acknowledge his particular indebtedness to Professor Emery Neff, who was kind enough to read critically the original manuscript, and to make several valuable suggestions for its improvement. To Cecil H. Radford of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church in Lincoln, he is grateful for innumerable kindnesses and a great deal of information about Cooper; and to Mrs. Celeste Peardon for considerable assistance in research. The generous kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Ash, who freely placed at his disposal all the papers Cooper left in their care at his death also deserves grateful acknowledgment. It only remains to add that this study was originally authorized and finally approved by one to whom not only the writer but the world of English scholarship is under lasting obligation—the late Professor Ashley Horace Thorndike.

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# THOMAS COOPER

## THE CHARTIST

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### CHAPTER I

#### CHILDHOOD

Thomas Cooper was born in the town of Leicester in the county of the same name on the 20th of March, 1805. His parents were poor and undistinguished, and little is known about them. His father, who died when Cooper was but four years old, was a descendant of Yorkshire Quakers, and, like his own son, was left fatherless in childhood. At an early age the elder Cooper was apprenticed by his Quaker grandfather to a dyer in Longacre, London. Under the influence of city life "he gave up the strictness of life in which his childhood had been trained, and ceased to belong to the Society of Friends."<sup>1</sup> Some time before his marriage to Cooper's mother he went out to India for a short time, and after his return to England he traveled extensively about the kingdom in pursuit of his trade. He met his second wife, Cooper's mother, in the course of his wanderings through Lincolnshire. Cooper nowhere mentions the fact that his father had been married before, or that he was already blessed with a daughter at the time of his second marriage.<sup>2</sup>

Of his mother's family Cooper knew only that they bore the old Saxon name of Jobson, and were small farmers and carriers in Lincolnshire, and some of them fishermen on the seacoast. Concerning the latter, one of his early

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Thomas Cooper Written by Himself* [14th thousand], London, 1882, pp. 3-4 [This source is referred to hereafter as *Life*.]

<sup>2</sup> It seems probable that she was reared from childhood by her mother's people. Cooper lived on good terms with his half-sister all his life, and when they had both reached old age sent her a regular allowance.

tales tells the life story of his Uncle Tom, one of a large family, who was set to work gathering cockles at the age of five. When he was twelve, with the aid of a slightly older brother, Tom netted a school of brets so large that it sold for seven pounds, more money than his fisherman father had ever earned in a week. He shipped for Greenland when he was fourteen years old, and had made a dozen voyages to that country, the West Indies, the Guinea coast and to the Orient before he was thirty. He met his death in Hull harbor striving to save the last of five people upset from a small boat, having previously saved the other four.<sup>3</sup>

Cooper's great-grandfather on his mother's side was an innkeeper at Northampton; his grandfather, Luke Jobson, like his son after him, was a public carrier, plying weekly between Market Rasen and Gainsborough. The younger Luke, Cooper's uncle, rented a score of acres from "Squire Tennyson of Tealby", the grandfather of the Poet Laureate.

Cooper's father, up to the time of his early death, provided for his wife and child without difficulty, as the Napoleonic wars caused a temporary increase in wages and stimulated all kinds of work. His dye house was located on the Leate, a small tributary of the Exe, and was reached by means of a little wooden bridge. When he was two years old Cooper tumbled from this bridge into the water, and was carried some distance downstream before he could be rescued. A year later his father took him to hear the playing of the great organ in St. Peter's Cathedral at Exeter early on Christmas morning, and gave him as Christmas gifts a little hammer, seemingly the only plaything he ever had, and a copy of the fables of *Æsop*. Having been to India and all over England the father often related tales of his adventures for the child's amusement. In Cooper's recollection these few years before his father's death were among the happiest of his childhood.

After his father's death, which occurred at Exeter in 1809, the family having removed to that place from Leicester

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, Thomas "The Nurture of a Young Sailor; or the History of Cockle Tom," *Old Fashioned Stories*, London, 1880, pp. 99-110.

in 1806, Cooper's mother returned to her native Lincolnshire, settling down in the little town of Gainsborough on the river Trent; and it was here, far removed from the misery of the industrial city in which he had been born, that Cooper grew to manhood.

Mrs. Cooper at this time was in her fortieth year, and having learned the dyer's trade from her husband, and being very strong, she set up in business for herself in a small two-roomed house, of which the upstairs served for a bedroom, while the ground floor was utilized as a combined kitchen, living-room and dye-house. But after the business attracted by the novelty of her starting as dyer had dropped off, Mrs. Cooper found little profit in her new enterprise. To add to her meager income, and help pay off the debt incurred for the copper dye kettles, she also began to manufacture pasteboard boxes, which were then widely used in Lincolnshire as work boxes and clothing containers. As there was only a limited market in Gainsborough itself she began to visit the neighboring villages and farms to sell them, carrying the light boxes on her head, the smaller inside the larger. When the village or hamlet was near by she took the child with her. On one of these excursions they met a master-sweep and his two grimy apprentices bending under the weight of heavy soot bags. Knowing that she was having difficulty to make up the rent, and that her landlord had the reputation of being a hard man, the sweep endeavored to persuade her that she ought to turn her small son over to him as an apprentice; and taking two golden guineas from his purse he offered them to her if she would consent. The child was terrified at the thought of leaving his mother, but she had no intention of parting from him, and they left the sweep in a swearing rage because of her stubborn independence. He declared that he would have the boy yet, as she would be unable to escape bringing him and herself to the work house, but this prophecy remained unfulfilled, as Mrs. Cooper not only kept out of the "Bastille," but managed to avoid having to ask for any parish aid.

When she went on more distant journeys the mother left the child with such neighbors as were willing to look after him. One of these kept a humble lodging-house, and the beggars and wandering pedlars who frequented it amused the little fellow with fairy-tales or witch and ghost stories. Equally exciting was blind Thomas Chatterton's recollection of how during the Egyptian campaign he and his comrades had stepped out of the long-boats up to the waist in water, and charged the French with the bayonet.

At the age of five Cooper was so severely stricken with smallpox that he was blinded for nineteen days, and thrice given up for dead. When the disease finally left him he was so wasted that the bones came through his skin, leaving scars on knee, hip, and elbow which endured for life, as did the pit-marks on his face. He had been a pretty child until the smallpox scarred him, and young as he was felt the change in manner of grown-ups towards him on that account. "Some frowned with ill-natured dislike at his marred visage; \* \* \* others looked pitiful, and said 'Poor thing!'" <sup>4</sup>

Before this time he had learned to read almost without instruction, and at the age of three used to be set on a stool to teach a dull seven-year old his letters. When he was strong enough to resume his books his mother placed him in the dame's school of aged Gertrude Arram, renowned locally for her teaching and knitting. Such a bright scholar was bound to attract favorable notice among learners for the most part dull and laborious, and under regular instruction by the time he was six he was able to "spell wonderfully" and to read the tenth chapter of Nehemiah with all its hard names "like the parson in the church."

The Bible, which he inherited from his father in a Baskerville quarto edition illustrated with fine engravings, colored many of his childish thoughts. He imagined the stars as pin-holes in the golden floor of heaven, and in the moon saw the figure of the poor man whom the Israelites

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<sup>4</sup> *Life*, p. 6.

stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day (Numbers xv; 32).

In 1811 Cooper's mother moved to a better habitation, where the copper dye-kettles were relegated to a room by themselves. The back of these premises opened into Sailor's Alley, where lived a favorite playmate, Thomas Miller, later in life a prolific producer of popular romances and books of verse.

The years from 1811 to 1814 were among the hottest of the war and Cooper recalled vividly how the postman, old Matthew Goy, would ride into town when there was a victory with his hat covered with ribbons, and blowing his horn mightily.

Love of nature was fostered in the lad by his rural surroundings. He gathered all the wild flowers in their season, and often longed to know their names, but there was no one to tell him. From a school-friend whose father was a fisherman and herb-gatherer he learned the names of "agrinomy, and wood betony, and wood-sage, and mountain-flax, and other herbs which were to be found in the neighborhood and were used as medicine by the poor."<sup>5</sup>

"Merrie England" had not yet entirely disappeared. Maypoles were yet in existence, and the May day festival was regularly celebrated within five miles of Gainsborough. Dancing on the green was practiced in scores of Lincolnshire villages, and the singing of ballads was a nightly occurrence in the public houses. There was a bull-running at Stamford, and now and then a wandering foreigner was coaxed to let his bear be baited by bull-dogs. Cock-fighting was still popular, and badger-baiting, though disappearing, might still be seen. In Lancashire and Staffordshire savage bull-dogs were bred and set to fight.<sup>6</sup> In short, eighteenth century conditions still lingered on in Gainsborough, a fact not without importance in Cooper's after development.

In 1813, when Cooper was eight years old, a new charity school was opened, the second to be established by

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<sup>5</sup> *Life* pp. 18-19.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper, *Thomas Thoughts at Fourscore and Earlier*, London, 1885, p. 8.

deceased gentry for the education of poor children in Gainsborough, and Cooper's mother succeeded in entering him amongst the first pupils. This institution, in addition to instruction, donated a blue-coat uniform and cap yearly to each pupil. Twenty-five years later William Lovett was to denounce such dress and badge-proclaiming schools as an indication that the wealthy regarded education as "their own prerogative, and a boon to be sparingly conferred upon the multitude, instead of a universal instrument for advancing the dignity of man;"<sup>1</sup> but as the first Parliamentary grant towards education was still many years in the future, and Cooper as a child knew what it was to be shoeless and to wear ragged clothing, he was properly grateful for being allowed to become a charity school boy, and to receive a coat and cap, blue with yellow trimmings, every Christmas. The studies of the school were the usual three R's—"reading the Scriptures, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic"—but Cooper felt that what he learned at this time furnished a good preparation for his later studies.

At Christmas time, in addition to receiving a new uniform, the blue coat boys were examined in their catechism by the vicar—"the best judge of the quality of a bottle of port, the best hand at loo or whist, and the best patron of the play and ball-room in the whole town"—and went around the town in a procession to collect their "Christmas-boxes." Money, and sometimes bread and cheese and beer, were given them at most houses. One year, when the season was particularly severe, the larger lads persuaded the shivering little boys to go home with a few halfpence each, while they went on and obtained a much larger share for themselves.

During his final year at the charity school Cooper was made a member of the boy choir of the parish church, and the beautiful and stately music of its service seems first to have aroused in him the enthusiasm for good music

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<sup>1</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, [two vols.] London, 1920, I, 141.

which distinguished him throughout his later life. He contracted a passion for the dulcimer at this time from hearing the organist's father, old Mr. Hand, play upon that instrument, and his mother by severe self-denial scraped together its purchase price, thirty shillings. Mr. Hand, "a gentlemanly person, though he had a wooden leg," gave instruction gratis, and after a few lessons his young pupil was able to play by ear any tune that he knew or once heard. His not learning to read music, or to play upon some more important instrument, was a source of regret to him in after life.

In the autumn his charity school granted two or three weeks of vacation, known locally as "the gleaning holidays." This period the boy often passed with his uncle Luke Jobson, with whom he was a great favorite, at Market Rasen, a small town twenty-one miles from Gainsborough. Like his father before him this uncle traveled between the two places each week as a public carter. As he had never received any schooling, to his dying day he "knew never a letter i' the book save round O." Cooper used to meet him each Friday after school hours to read the directions on his letters and parcels, receiving a few coppers for his services. The carrier was a steady, dependable man, a pattern of industry, and despite his lack of learning managed to hoard up three hundred spade-guineas in a stocking foot during his life time. As he was a tenant of Squire Tennyson, grandfather of the poet, it is quite possible that the future Laureate may have met him during his visits to Tealby, where Charles Tennyson [Turner] was curate for a time; though Luke Jobson, notwithstanding his small store of guineas, was too honest and open-hearted to have inspired the "Northern Farmer."

The large thatched cottage of the farmer-carter must have been a delightful spot in which to spend the holidays, and Cooper's recollections of the place remained vivid sixty years after he had first visited it.

The outer room had a wide open chimney. My uncle's chair was under it, and you could see the swallows' nests in the chimney as you sat in the chair. On the chimney front hung a curious old picture

painted on oak, displaying a cat playing bagpipes to dancing mice in one corner; and a gamester shaped like an ape playing at cards with clowns in another. Above was the legend:

‘Gamesters and puss alike doe watch,  
And play with those they aim toe catch.’

In the inner room, or parlour, was a heavy antique clock; and on the walls hung ‘Twelve Golden Rules of Good King Charles’<sup>8</sup> and ‘Death and the Lady,’ a long serious dialogue in verse.<sup>9</sup>

Out of doors, too, was equally interesting and exciting. “In my uncle’s field,” Cooper records, “and on the adjoining moors, I saw wild birds and wild four-footed creatures in abundance; weasels, ferrets, fomarts, moles, hedgehogs were often taken, and owls and hawks shot. The kestrel often hovered overhead; and now and then a glede or kite would soar aloft.”<sup>10</sup>

Once when he was riding to Gainsborough with his uncle on a night journey they stopped just before the dawn to allow the horses to graze; and the boy, surprised into sudden wakefulness as the cart ceased its slow and jolting progress, looked out to discover a vision of wonder, hundreds of small, dull, strange-looking lights scattered over a wide field, like the watch-fires of the Little People described by the wandering pedlars. Prosaically enough, they proved to be merely glow-worms although his uncle declared he had never before seen so many together at one time.

It was as a child that Cooper first heard of the notorious Corn Laws, Parliament having passed in 1815 the first of these embargoes, which absolutely forbade the importation of foreign wheat until the domestic price reached eighty shillings a quarter. Cooper was then ten years old, and he remembered how Martin Jackson, a half-lunatic, “went through the streets with a helmet on his head, and a piebald dress, on which were fastened papers inscribed

<sup>8</sup> Goldsmith, in his “Description of an Author’s Bedroom,” mentions “the twelve Rules the Royal Martyr drew;” and Southey in chap. iv of *The Doctor* remarks that “King Charles’ Golden Rules were posted against the wall.” I have found no citation of the rules themselves, however, nor any explanation of when or why they were drawn up.

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> *Life*, p. 20.

'No Corn Bill!' \* \* \* Plain Gainsborough folk understood little about politics at that time but some shook their heads shrewdly and said, 'Martin is right, in spite of all his craziness.' "<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30. It was not until twenty years later that Ebenezer Elliott began his famous series of *Corn Law Rhymes*.

## CHAPTER II

### SHOEMAKING

Gainsborough at the beginning of the nineteenth century, before the coming of the railroad, was a thriving river-port, visited by scores of vessels from the adjoining sea towns. Sailors were frequently seen in the streets, and in spite of the Heygre, a rushing tidal wave which frequently roared up the Trent to knock the small boats about, it was a lively center of shipping.<sup>1</sup>

While life was hard during Cooper's early years, because of the high cost of food and the heavy burden of war taxes, the worst scenes of want and unemployment such as shortly afterwards visited the factory towns, were here unknown. Not but that Cooper's mother experienced very real hardship during the war years, when wheat flour rose to six shillings per stone, and meat was so dear that often the family dinner consisted of potatoes alone. But in Gainsborough there was still some feeling of neighborly benevolence, and during the dreadful winter of 1813-14 certain kindly Quakers, assisted by the gentry and wealthier tradesmen, distributed soup, biscuits, potatoes, and red-herrings gratis two or three times a week to all who applied. And while taxes were heavy, and the tax-gatherer oppressive, it was sometimes possible to avoid a "distraint" by moving beds, chairs, and tables in the middle of the night to the house of an obliging neighbor like Thomas Chatterton.<sup>2</sup> Some of the magistrates were lenient in enforcing the onerous taxes against a hard-working widow, but others were inexorable.

The arrival of the "Great Peace" in 1814 was celebrated in Gainsborough by bands of music in the street, a thanks-

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<sup>1</sup> Gainsborough on the Trent was probably the prototype of the village of St. Oggs in George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, which was located on a similar tidal river.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 27.

giving sermon and anthems at the church, and a general illumination at night. There was also a "grand emblematical procession" which included representations of Wellington, the Czar, Blucher and Bonaparte. The following day this was imitated by Cooper and a number of his companions, who marched in mock procession to Lea, and were presented with a silver half-crown by Sir Charles Anderson for their school hymns and patriotic cheers.

Cooper's fiery temper, which got him into trouble frequently in later life, manifested itself at an early age. When a playmate mischievously attempted to demolish his snow-man, Cooper struck the boy with his shovel, inflicting an ugly wound on his forehead. He wept daily in repentance till Bob grew well, which luckily occurred within a week.

In 1816 occurred another change of residence, this time to Old George Yard. Here a stable whose courtyard contained a bountifully flowing well was converted half into a dye-house and half into living quarters, the advantage of plenty of water for dyeing, and the escaping of high rent and heavy taxes making the premises desirable for Mrs. Cooper's purposes.

The new residence adjoined a popular day school for boys maintained by John Briggs, and to this school Cooper, now eleven years old, transferred. He attended this excellent institution for the next four years, until May 1820, helping the proprietor for an hour each day instead of paying the regular fees. He here advanced in mathematics to mensuration and the elements of algebra, and had the further advantage of association with boys of some degree of breeding.

The early reading of those who later turn author is apt to be wide and voluminous, and Cooper was no exception to this rule. Beginning with the Bible and *Æsop's Fables*, he advanced with Victorian inevitability to *Pilgrim's Progress*, which he perused "with wonder and rapture." From a traveling book-seller, or "number-man", he borrowed the parts of Baine's *History of the War, Pamela*,

*The Earl of Moreland*, and stories of the famous highwaymen Nevison and Turpin, and of Bampfylde Moore-Carew, King of the Gypsies. From his better-off companions at the Briggs school he obtained the loan of such books as Mavor's "British Plutarch", Goldsmith's histories, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Philip Quarll*, and (what perhaps inflamed his later passion for languages) Salmon's Geography, containing the Lord's Prayer in thirty tongues. From the kind-hearted numberman his mother took in the parts of *Dialogues between a Pilgrim, Adam, Noah and Cleophas*, and from the circulating library of the shop where he obtained his school supplies he was able to borrow the *Arabian Nights*, odd plays of Shakespeare, Dryden, and Otway, *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Scottish Chiefs*. "A heap of other romances and novels that would require pages even to name"<sup>3</sup> were also devoured. In short, like thousands of other literarily-inclined lads before and since, he read in early youth anything and everything he could get hold of.

The first rimes he remembered reading with conscious delight were those of the old ballad of *Chevy Chase*, which when he was nine years old, made him feel as did the sight of Matthew Goy when he rode into town with the news of a victory. Except for this experience he remained untouched by poetry until his thirteenth year, when by chance he stumbled upon *Manfred* and one of the cantos of *Childe Harold*. At the time he knew nothing of the noble author's life or reputation, but Byron's poems thrilled him as no verse ever had before.

One day, while standing before the shop of a Gainsborough bookseller, he heard a bawling pedlar of broadside ballads proclaim the wonderful contents of a pamphlet he was selling which told of the appearance of a betrayed young woman to her former sweetheart, followed by his public confession and death. "All of which happened," concluded the pedlar, "but one month ago in the county of Cornwall—and here are the names of ten creditable parishioners of the place who heard the young man's confession."

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<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 34.

He sold off a number of copies to his audience of credulous butterwomen, especially to the younger ones, whom he urged to take the broadside home, and let their sweethearts read it to them if they could not read themselves. Cooper borrowed one of the tracts from a purchaser, and feeling certain that he had glanced at a similar tale in a volume of old pamphlets on the book-seller's stall but a few minutes before, he hunted out the collection again, and upon comparing the stories saw that they were "the same to a letter, save that the copy on the stall affirmed the apparition to have taken place at Westmoreland more than half a century before." <sup>4</sup>

When he was twelve Cooper had been so impressed by the opening address of a Methodist lay-preacher, Moses Holden, who came to Gainsborough to deliver a series of talks on astronomy, which he illustrated with charts and an orrery, that he went round the neighborhood reproducing the lecturer's explanations for pennies, and in this way earned enough to attend the entire series of lectures. A notable local character known as "the wise man of Retford" later persuaded him to undertake the study of astrology, and he had a severe fit of this insanity some years later.

His first acquaintance with the political agitation of the day Cooper obtained from the Gainsborough brush-makers, partisans of Cobbett, Woolner, and Hunt, who loaned him copies of radical newspapers. Thus early were the seeds of political reform planted in the breast of the future Chartist agitator.

It was in his fourteenth year that Cooper experienced his first religious conversion. This was the result of the preaching and exhorting of two traveling Primitive Methodist evangelists, or "Ranters", as they were popularly called. The young penitent was so overcome with anguish for his supposed wickedness that he no longer found delight in anything but reading the Bible and getting off into a corner twenty times a day to pray for the forgiveness of his sins.

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<sup>4</sup> Cooper, Thomas *Old Fashioned Stories*, London, 1874, pp. 276-278.

This abnormal condition lasted for several weeks, until Cooper's developing intellectual powers created a stumbling block. To receive pardon for his sins the exhorters told him, he must have faith, for without faith there could be no remission of sin. As to how such faith was to be obtained, he was told to "act faith", and he would find it. But Cooper felt that such a method of persuading himself that his sins were forgiven was merely pardoning himself, and not any divine forgiveness of the Holy Spirit. A reaction against this unnatural preoccupation with the state of his soul was precipitated by the demand of the Ranters, due perhaps to his troublesome and puzzling doubts, that he forswear all reading save "truly religious books." The young neophyte rebelled against this obscurantism, and finally dropped away entirely from those who had first led him into a realm where he was to wander widely during the rest of his life—that of religious speculation.

Another problem which caused him much anxiety was the choice of a vocation upon the completion of his four years at the Briggs school. His mother was ambitious for him, and in spite of criticism and direful predictions regarding his future had kept her son at school until he was fifteen—an unheard of indulgence amongst people of her station. Her hopes that he might become a mercantile clerk or even an apprentice painter were disappointed, as she was unable to pay the required premium. The neighbors pointed out that she had better be content with some more humble calling, and that her son was in danger of becoming an idle good-for-nothing if he were not put to work soon. The boy himself was not spared similar outspoken opinions, and felt useless and unhappy. Fired by the example of a schoolboy friend he finally conceived the idea of going to sea. To his mother the news of this intention was a sad blow, and for some time she refused her consent. But nine days aboard a brig which was loading in Hull harbor were sufficient to cure Cooper of all desire to become a sailor. The cursing and swearing and brutality which he witnessed not only on his own ship but also

on other vessels near by rendered him so wretched that he told the captain he wished to go home, and was profanely informed he might go as soon as he liked, for he would never be fit for a sailor.

Learning soon afterward that another apprentice was wanted at the shoemaking shop of Joseph Clark, Cooper asked his mother to let him try for it, and she reluctantly gave her consent, saying, "The Lord's will be done; I don't think He intends thee to spend thy life at shoemaking." Cooper was a little over fifteen when he sat down in Clark's garret to learn this craft. He was at first a prime favorite with his young master, who had haunted the theatres while he was in London, and liked to describe what he had seen and heard there. Clark's enthusiasm for Shakespeare led Cooper to further investigation of the great plays, and paved the way for his later enthusiasm for *Hamlet* and *Lear*. His employer also introduced him to Burns, and thereafter the pathos of the Scotch poet possessed his heart almost as much as had the force and passion of Byron. But Clark had much of the admired Byron's capriciousness of temper. Because of his temperamental outbursts Cooper stayed with this first employer for little more than a year, and never completed any real apprenticeship to the trade of shoemaking. After six months with another small master he obtained employment in a shop which dealt only in cheap foot-wear. This meager experience he supplemented by some lessons from an itinerant master workman, but never having served any full apprenticeship the utmost he was ever able to earn as a shoemaker was ten shillings a week.

When he was sixteen and seventeen, as a result of widening intellectual friendships he joined a Mutual Improvement Society, and helped Joseph F. Winks to found and conduct an Adult School, which met on Sundays for the purpose of teaching illiterate laborers to read and write. With the departure of Winks from Gainsborough the school collapsed, but it initiated Cooper into a kind of educational work which he afterwards carried far.

## CHAPTER III

### SELF-EDUCATION

It was while living with his mother in Gainsborough and working as a shoemaker that, at the age of nineteen, Cooper began that course in self-education which made him an outstanding figure among the working population of Victorian England. While his erudition was not so profound as it was supposed to be by many members of his own class, it was, nevertheless, of very creditable proportions, considering its possessor's meager opportunities and the immense disadvantages under which he labored while acquiring it.

He was first inspired to his laborious enterprise by a magazine article dealing with the career of Dr. Samuel Lee, who, beginning life as a carpenter's apprentice, mastered in time more than a dozen languages and eventually became Professor of Hebrew in Cambridge University. Cooper resolved to emulate this paragon. To carry out the ambitious program of reading and study which he laid out for himself he rose in the morning at four o'clock [in summer at three] and studied diligently, usually history or some language, until six-thirty. After breakfasting with a book or periodical in his hand he sat down at seven o'clock to commence his day's shoemaking, usually piece-work carried on in his own home. From one to two o'clock, his dinner-time, he had another half hour or so with his books, followed by confinement to the cobbler's bench until eight or nine at night. While at work he repeated audibly declensions, conjugations and rules of syntax or the poetry of some famous author. After the evening meal at nine o'clock he returned to reading or memorizing until compelled to go to bed from sheer exhaustion. In this way he committed to memory, notes and all, almost the entire volume of the *Rudiments of the Latin Tongue* by Thomas

Ruddiman. He also worked through a Greek grammar, though somewhat less diligently, and began the study of Hebrew, having picked up a treatise on that language at a book-stall for a shilling. In addition to this language study he also worked regularly at mathematics, and read in philosophy the productions of Berkley, Locke, and Dugald Stewart. He worked out a detailed analysis of Dr. Clarke's *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, and another of Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*—this latter in order to acquire “a thorough judgment of style and literary excellence.” He likewise learned the play of *Hamlet* “entirely and perfectly by heart”; also the beginning of *Lear*, the first four books of *Paradise Lost*, and thousands of lines of Burns and all of the poets of the Romantic period—Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Moore, Campbell, Southey, Shelley, and Keats. Some of these books he borrowed from friends; others, especially in the older English literature, he got from a neglected and half-forgotten collection bequeathed to the town in the eighteenth century by a wealthy mercer. He was also allowed access after shop hours to the books and periodicals obtained for the local book society, a privilege for which he paid ten shillings instead of the membership subscription of two guineas. The Waverly novels, *Frankenstein*, and the works of Washington Irving were thus obtained as fast as they came from the press; also the monthly numbers of the *London Magazine*, where he first read the *Essays of Elia*, Hazlitt's *Picture Galleries*, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, and Carlyle's *Life of Schiller*.

His belief in the infallibility of the Bible received a severe shock from Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* and Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, and for a time he gave up church attendance altogether. But the premature death of the young man from whom he had borrowed these books seemed almost like a divine judgment, and under the influence of older and more orthodox friends he took up a

course of Sunday readings in "Evidences for Christianity,"<sup>1</sup> although he did not abandon his secular studies.

In the winter, as his poverty made a fire impossible except for a few hours during the day, he had to depend for warmth in the cold early morning upon his lamp, which he placed on a stool, and the stool atop a little round table. Then with a bit of old rug around his feet, and his mother's shawl over his shoulders, he would pursue his studies, keeping up a constant rocking motion in order to ward off cold and sleep. In this way, too, he passed the hours from nine to twelve of a winter's night.<sup>2</sup>

As anyone but such an inexperienced young enthusiast would have realized, such an unremitting strain upon immature mental and physical powers was bound to result in a breakdown, particularly as he accomplished all this labor upon a diet lacking in variety, and often insufficient in amount. The first symptoms of overwork, occasional swoonings at the end of the day's occupations, occurred only after three years of this Spartan regimen. These danger signals brought some relaxation of study and early rising, but the strain had been too great, and in November of his twenty-second year he was compelled to take to his bed, and to remain there, except for a brief period each day, for nine weeks. Towards the end of his illness he suffered a relapse, and once was pronounced dead by a visiting neighbor.

When the overwrought youth began finally to recover, he was afflicted with a peculiar nervous tremor when he again attempted manual labor, a condition which made it necessary for him to find some different kind of employ-

<sup>1</sup> A list of these from Paley's *Natural Theology* to Warburton's *Legislation of Moses* may be found in the *Life*, pp. 58-59. The impression of such reading upon a youthful mind helps to account for the later return to Christianity after twelve years of scepticism, and the subsequent devotion of his life to lecturing and writing on the evidences for Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Alton Locke*, chap. iii, where Kingsley describes his hero as in exactly similar circumstances. For a full discussion of Kingsley's considerable indebtedness in this novel to his knowledge of Cooper's life vide Cazamian, Louis, *Kingsley et Thomas Cooper, etude sur une source d'Alton Locke*.

ment. Two friends suggested a vocation which it seems surprising he should not have thought of for himself—school-mastering. With their assistance he obtained a large room previously used for club meetings and furnished with forms, where on March 10, 1828, just ten days before his twenty-third birthday, he opened school.

As his studies and reading were known in the town, and he had gained some local reputation for learning, his school was eagerly patronized, principally by the poor, although he had a few children from the middle class, so that in the course of twelve months he had a hundred pupils enrolled, and was thinking of engaging an assistant.

In the beginning he carried on his new vocation with characteristic impetuosity. Because of extra classes early and late he was sometimes in the school-room from five in the morning until nine at night, and he spent more than fifty pounds for pictures and plaster casts with which to ornament the walls of his class rooms.

His reading of the biography of the missionary Henry Martyn a short time before he was compelled to take to his bed had again turned his thoughts towards religious matters, from which his widening intellectual outlook had previously alienated him. He told himself that he should be ashamed to doubt when so fine a scholar as Martyn had been fully convinced of the truth of religion. When he was at last able to attend a place of worship, about a month before the opening of his school, he commenced going to the chapel of the Independents with his friend Hough. But finding insufficient warmth in this sect he left them to attend the services of the parish church, whose young curate had lent him Latin and Greek texts as well as religious books. He began to attend the Established Church services three times every Sunday, and for a few months the association of its ritual and music with memories of his boyhood brought the desired peace. Yet he soon felt the need of some more positive experience to help him overcome the trials of temper attendant upon his teaching. By the end of 1828 he was "really wretched" on account of his

low spiritual state, and felt that he must lead a devotedly religious life or else experience continually "a sense of degradation and falseness." In this frame of mind he decided to rejoin the Methodists, and in their ranks he found for a time a real cure for his dissatisfaction and heart-ache, although he was long disturbed by the fact that he never received any unmistakable evidence of the divine presence which he could feel was not produced by his own mind.

A reading of the *Life of William Bramwell*, and of Wesley's *Sermons*, kindled anew his ambition to achieve holiness, and by relinquishing all plans of learning and study, which he felt killed spirituality, he did obtain it for a few months. During this period he held prayer services in the school four times a day, and abolished corporal punishment. For a time he achieved a peace of mind which seemed worth all it cost. "If throughout eternity in heaven," he declares, "I be as happy as I often was for whole days during that short period of my religious life, it will be heaven indeed." But alas for human nature!

This was exhausting to the body as well as to the soul. The perpetual tension \* \* \* of the will seemed, at last, to be more than I could sustain. One day when I was faint and weak in frame, I lost my temper under great provocation from a disobedient boy in the school, and suddenly seized the cane and struck him. The whole school seemed horror-stricken. The poor children gazed as if on a fallen angel, with such looks of commiseration upon my poor self as I cannot describe. I wished I was in a corner to weep, for I was choking with tears, and felt heart-broken.<sup>3</sup>

Thereafter his religious life was on a somewhat less exalted plane, though for the next six years [from 1829 to 1835] he continued to be an active and earnest worker among the Wesleyans. He was early appointed prayer-leader, and afterwards local preacher to the neighboring towns and villages. His reading in the seventeenth and eighteenth century divines, and his superior education, made his preaching of better quality than that of most of his colleagues. As a result he had larger congregations

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 86.

than any other local preacher, and sometimes had to break off speaking because of the shouts of praise or penitential tears of his audiences. Thus early he learned the art of swaying an audience by his eloquence, and tasted the sweets of popular acclaim.

By 1833, five years after its commencement, the school which had been started with such high hopes and so much enthusiasm was beginning to be in difficulties. This was due to two causes. In the first place, as he frankly admits, after the passing on of his first pupils, and his beginning again with those of duller intellects and more captious parents, he lost his passion for teaching, and began to regard it as unwelcome drudgery. Then, too, by this time religious zeal sometimes overrode ordinary ethical considerations, for when he was invited to speak in some distant part of the circuit he did not hesitate to close the school early, sometimes an hour before the proper time of conclusion. The emotional excitement of a rousing religious meeting was more interesting now than the dull routine of teaching thick-skulled hobbledehoys.

He was keenly disappointed, also, by his inability to impress upon his humble pupils the importance of Latin. He was authorized to teach the language to the sons of an officer of the excise, but there was no desire on the part of the parents of any other of his pupils that they should study it. He wished to teach it to all, however, and teach it he did, although of necessity gratuitously. Even this was unsuccessful. Of those who were induced to begin the language, the larger number never got far enough to be able to construe a Latin sentence. Parents were equally unresponsive. "I want our Jack to larn to write a good hand. What's the use of his larning Latin? It will niver be no use to him." "Such," exclaims the embittered pedagogue, "were the kind of thanks I had from the poor when I tried to benefit their children, without any cost to themselves." \*

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\* *Life*, p. 76.

Added to this disappointment with his school was a serious controversy with his religious superior. The Methodist District Superintendent appears to have been both idle and crafty, and when he was returned to Gainsborough a second time, after it had been promised that he would be sent elsewhere, Cooper wrote letters of complaint to the President of the Conference, but owing to the peculiar system of appointments in the Methodist Church no action could then be taken. In revenge the Superintendent arbitrarily suspended Cooper and another young local preacher from their office, without preferring any charges against them, or allowing them the privilege of a trial.<sup>5</sup> A special district meeting had to be called to settle the trouble, and this body reinstated Cooper and his friend. But the Superintendent afterwards prevented them from taking any part in the public prayer-meetings, and preached against them in terms which made their skin creep.

Under these circumstances of difficulty Cooper felt that the best thing for him to do was to leave Gainsborough. Accordingly he sought for a school elsewhere. At first there seemed no opening, but finally he learned of a post in Lincoln, the death of a schoolmaster relative of his future wife providing the requisite vacancy.

Before following him to the cathedral city [he took the school there in November, 1833, in his twenty-eighth year] something should be said about his literary activity up to this time. His first poem, entitled "A Morning in Spring," he composed out of doors at the age of fifteen. From that time forth he composed other brief pieces in rhyme and made some attempt at blank verse, but produced nothing worthy of preservation. His committing to memory so many passages of the poetry of others repressed

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<sup>5</sup>When writing his autobiography, Cooper refused to set down the name of this Superintendent, but in 1856, shortly after his return to Christianity, the newspaper accounts of his lectures show that he freely announced it. The persecution of this man, and of his Lincoln coadjutor, Cooper declared, had driven him out of Methodism, and soured his mind against all professors of religion. Anyone interested in learning the names of these individuals may consult the *Norfolk News* of April 10, 1858.

and discouraged for some time his own attempts at composition, but he felt that he was educating his mind and ear, and would be ripe for better work in due time.

That time had not yet arrived, however, when he published his first book, which like many others owed its inception to the passion of love, a sentiment which he hitherto had been too fully absorbed in other fervors to think about. Of his wife Susanna Chaloner, who was the daughter of a Methodist revivalist, he tells us merely that he first saw her while visiting in Lincoln during Christmas week in 1829. Despite his having fallen in love at first sight, he did not "offer his heart and hand," to quote his own phraseology, until July, 1831, and the marriage did not take place until nearly three years later. In his autobiography Cooper devotes almost double the space allotted to his courtship to describing the beginning at this time of his lifelong friendship with Frederick James Jobson, to whom that book was dedicated; but this fact is no indication of the relative importance of the two events in his mind, for the marriage proved a happy one, Mrs. Cooper's devotion to her husband throughout his stormy career being sufficiently proved by frequent contemporary references to her, and their mutual affection by the letters which passed between them, particularly those written just before her death.

Before falling in love Cooper had not attempted verse for some six years, but he "wrote verses irresistibly now."<sup>6</sup> From the composing of pieces to be inserted in his love letters he went on to the thought of writing something that might be published. In 1833 his first volume appeared. It contained twenty-four short pieces in blank verse and rhyme and was entitled *The Wesleyan Chiefs; and Other Poems*. Published in London for subscribers by Hamilton, Adams & Company, 33 Paternoster Row, the little book was dedicated to James Montgomery, whose name headed the list of 350 subscribers, many of whom

<sup>6</sup> See the *Poetical Works of Thomas Cooper* [Section IV—Early Pieces] for two of his love poems, dated "Gainsborough, 1832."

pledged for more than one copy [although the author complains that a number of his subscribers never paid him]; so that the edition was probably about 500 copies.

The Address by the Author, which precedes the 95 pages of verse, is dated February 17, 1833, and begins:

The Author of this volume assures all who may condescend to open it that they will not be more dissatisfied with its contents than himself. Necessity is his only argument for having ventured to put it forth to the world at all; and the circumstance that its syllables have been hastily strung together within the last nine months, within odd snatches of time, gained, or rather stolen, from the laborious duties of a public Day School must be the apology for its numerous imperfections.

These are so numerous, indeed, that, as the autobiography frankly confesses "many of the pieces are worthless, and none more so than the one which gave its name to the unfortunate little book."<sup>7</sup> As poetry the volume is wholly without value, and merely affords a curious example of the depths into which pietistic verse had sunk at the beginning of the last century. That Montgomery, "the greatest representative of Protestant religious poetry in the early part of the nineteenth century,"<sup>8</sup> should not only have accepted the dedication of such a collection, but also have assisted in bringing the volume out, is an indication either of kind-heartedness towards an earnest co-religionist, or of inability to distinguish poetry from doggerel when the subject matter was orthodox. Although this first volume brought neither money nor reputation to its author, that fact only made Cooper resolve the more firmly that he would some day write a poem which would not be a failure.

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<sup>7</sup> *Life*, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, H., *Literature of the Victorian Era*, Cambridge, 1921, p. 259. This poet must not be confused with Robert Montgomery. It is the latter whom Macaulay assailed so savagely in the *Edinburgh Review* of April, 1830.

## CHAPTER IV

### LINCOLN EXPERIENCES

Cooper's troubles with his superiors in the Methodist Church came to a climax at Lincoln, his old enemy the Gainsborough Superintendent having prejudiced the Superintendent there against him. Cooper describes this Lincoln official [without in the least realizing how completely the same description applied to himself] as without craft or guile, but rude, and easily impelled to act rashly. With his supervising officer prejudiced against him, and he himself resentful of being judged adversely upon another person's report, trouble was bound to occur. His first grievance was that although too ill at the time to keep a preaching appointment, he received a harsh reprimand for breaking it. Later, a personal controversy having developed between himself and a prominent member of the denomination, the Superintendent sided with the latter. The ill feeling which had gradually been developing on both sides resulted in an explosion when the Superintendent threatened to suspend the new local preacher from his office. Cooper replied hotly that he had been suspended once, but never would be again, and requested that his name be removed from the church-rolls, as he declined to remain a member any longer.

He was married on February 16, 1834, at the little church of St. Maryle-Wigford a few months after taking over the day school at Lincoln. His first home in that city was not far from the house where he and his wife were to spend their last years, although their little cottage in St. Mary's street, together with the street itself, had been by that time swept away to make room for the yards of the Great Northern Railway.

The day school prospered at first, for although the new master spent much time upon his own studies, he at-

tended to his duties assiduously. He was soon busy, too, with other teaching work in the evening, having arrived in Lincoln just as a Mechanics Institute was being organized there. These Institutes, one of the earliest attempts at adult education, catered originally, as their name indicates, to young men employed during the day as artisans or mechanics. Cooper was elected a member of the first committee of the new enterprise, with whose purpose he was in the heartiest sympathy, and was also a teacher, first of Latin, and afterwards, in addition, of a course in elementary French. The handicap of being able to read but not to pronounce the modern language he sought to remedy by study with Signor D'Albrione, an Italian political refugee, who in his youth had served as a cavalry officer in the armies of Napoleon and survived the retreat from Moscow and the defeat at Leipzig. In addition to studying French and Italian with D'Albrione Cooper continued further his own work in Greek<sup>1</sup> and Hebrew.

It was at Lincoln, too, that he began his career as a journalist, an interest which speedily superseded teaching. His entry upon this new profession had its origin in a brief article describing a series of lectures in chemistry at the Mechanics Institute which he sent in to the *Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury*, the principal newspaper of the county. Shortly afterwards its proprietor, Richard Newcomb, offered him twenty pounds a year to collect weekly a few items of market and other news. Cooper accepted the commission supposing it would not occupy much of his time, but as the months passed the new occupation made ever increasing demands upon him. Beginning in 1836 with half a column of local items, he was soon contributing from one and one-half to three columns of brief news paragraphs each week, and as Lincoln increased in importance after the passage of the Reform Bill he began to write reports on municipal affairs and political meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> At Gainsborough he had put one of his two advanced students into the *Anabasis* of Xenophon, and the other into the *Cyropaedia*. In Lincoln he "took up the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, ran through the odes of Anacreon, and then commenced the *Iliad*." Life, p. 104.

His salary advanced with his increasing output to forty, to sixty, to one hundred pounds per annum. In the end he found it both necessary and profitable to devote all his time to reporting, and school teaching was abandoned.

As a reporter who enlivened the staid old business paper with bristling criticisms and startling revelations of abuses he was a success from the beginning. A series of lively articles on "Lincoln Preachers" was also widely popular, and still makes interesting reading. In these seventeen pieces, which appeared over a period of some months, the dissenting clergymen come off somewhat better than do the Church of England dignitaries. Mr. Garvey, the most learned of the Cathedral vicars, was dealt with leniently, for Cooper always respected a scholar, but the Chancellor was accused of having bestowed upon his own offspring the two best stalls in his gift; the Dean was ironically complimented on his fifteen thousand pounds a year, and the Sub-Dean was said to resemble his predecessor Paley in his love of creature comforts merely. In short Cooper implied that the Cathedral incumbents were little better than so many English versions of Rabelais' clerics.<sup>2</sup> Nor did the parochial clergy fare much better. One was declared as much in his element within the sound of the Tory news-room dice-box six days of the week as he was in his surpliced vocation on the seventh. In contrast, however, another local vicar was commended as a man who dared "to confront a dignity of the Cathedral and tell him, in unequivocal language \* \* \* that a minister of the religion of the New Testament who exemplified its precepts by betting high figures at Doncaster or Newmarket was a living disgrace to the profession."<sup>3</sup>

One can well believe that this series was immensely popular, and that the young journalist was regarded as "the cleverest fellow in the place; and the man most to

<sup>2</sup> "In 1830 the church was at once an unpopular and a scandalous institution \* \* \* Dicey said that so far as the great scandals of pluralism, non-residence, and neglect of duty were concerned, the Establishment of 1850 was not the Establishment of 1830, but the Establishment of 1905." *Times Literary Supplement*, April 18, 1929.

<sup>3</sup> *Lincoln, Stamford, and Rutland Mercury*, December 15, 1837.

be dreaded."<sup>4</sup> The inflated egotism which resulted from this popularity led him later foolishly to break off his connection with the *Mercury* in order to seek his fortune in London.

His connection with the Lincoln Choral Society, whose first rehearsals were held in his school-room, was equally unfortunate in its conclusion. He was one of the charter members of the Society, singing tenor in the choruses, and was early elected to the post of secretary, and afterwards to that of treasurer. Once he had entered upon an undertaking he could never avoid throwing his whole nature into it, and in this instance during the three years which followed he obtained the aid of trained musicians for the new society, raised money for their remuneration, solicited funds for the purchase of a musical library and new instruments, and secured the use of St. Peter at Arches for two public concerts of sacred music.<sup>5</sup> By reason of his activity he, of necessity, created enemies, although in the *Mercury* there is no hint of any trouble until November 4, 1836. The article of that date, apparently written by Cooper himself, describes his re-election as secretary and concludes: "It is understood that a number of Wesleyans and others who have hitherto assisted as performing members will withdraw, but their loss will not be felt either by the society or the public." On the day following one of the "small number" so scornfully alluded to sent in a letter to the *Mercury's* rival, the *Lincoln, Boston, Gainsborough, and Newark Gazette*, which stated that the reason for Cooper's election was that he had succeeded in having a tool of his own appointed as chairman, but that he had been unsuccessful in his attempt to disqualify his opponents from voting. Doubts of the financial soundness of the organization were insinuated in view of the fact that no treasurer's report had been presented. The letter closed

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> The program and the names of the performers appeared in the *Lincoln, Stamford, and Rutland Mercury* of April 8, 1836. Cooper's re-election as secretary for the third year of the Society's existence is noted in the issue of May 18, 1836.

with a statement of the grievances of a Mr. Shaw, trumpeter, who was so opposed to Cooper's plan of giving secular as well as sacred music, and of employing other than local talent that he had submitted his resignation, applying at the same time for three pounds salary for the half year. Cooper met this demand by the assertion that there could be no claim for salary until the end of the year, and that anyone resigning before that time forfeited all claim to remuneration. Apparently Cooper was anxious to engage a professional musician to take the place of Mr. Shaw, and the latter, or one of his friends, wrote the retaliatory letter. The communication wound up with an assertion that in view of the expensive imported talent the original performing members would be lucky if they received any remuneration at all.

About a month later, shortly after the annual concert, which was given this year in the County Assembly Rooms, a further violent attack upon Cooper appeared in the *Lincoln, Boston, Gainsborough, and Newark Gazette* in the form of two letters to the editor. The first, signed by John Kirton, member of the Choral Society, gave an account of the second half-yearly meeting, at which a report was presented by the committee previously appointed to revise the society's rules. According to Kirton, these new rules, twenty in number, were hurried over once to the members present by Cooper as Secretary, who, when he had finished reading, without giving time for any consideration abruptly exclaimed, "Nobody objects; they are all passed." This is obviously exaggeration, although, foreseeing opposition, it is probable that Cooper did endeavor to rush the revised rules through before the opposition could organize. Any such intention was defeated by Kirton and his supporters, who succeeded in having action postponed until a general meeting could be called. Their complaint against the new rules was that they would completely change the original object of the society, by putting aside the practice of "sacred music" in favor of music selected by a committee from any source it thought proper, and by bringing in

non-resident musicians for public concerts. The organization, Mr. Kirton wrote, was now generally referred to derisively as "Cooper's Society," instead of by its original title, the Lincoln Society for the Cultivation of Sacred Music.

The second virulent letter in this same issue of the *Gazette* resulted from Cooper's attempt to set aside a local singer, Miss Charlton, in favor of a more professional performer. It is not surprising, in view of the violent feeling evident from these two letters, that a few weeks later Cooper resigned both his offices. The further triumph of his adversaries is indicated by the laconic statement in his notice of the Choral Society's subsequent concert that Miss Charlton kept her place as an established favorite.

At the end of this year of humiliation, after noting that the Society had met to the full all of its expenses, and had a small balance on hand, Cooper permitted himself the following fling at his adversaries:

After the unparalleled persecution to which the society has been subjected—the magnificent lies which have been circulated of the Committee being "£100 in debt, and nobody to pay the piper,"—and the attempts made in various malicious quarters to injure the credit of the society with the public, we trust that his statement of its financial condition will rouse every real friend of music. \* \* \* The property of the Society is untouched, except that [they] have suffered the loss of a chromatic slide trumpet worth a considerable sum, which has been taken from them by the principal author of the late dissension. [One wonders if this may not have been kept in lieu of the disputed half-yearly salary.] The Society, not having trustees, have no legal means of recovering their loss, and have, therefore, expelled the purloiner.<sup>6</sup>

The incomplete account given in the autobiography, which was written some thirty years later, shows by its bitterness that the memory of the above events still rankled.

Why, it may be asked, did such a remarkable preacher arouse such powerful enmities among the Methodists; why did he get into so much trouble with his fellow music-lovers? Cooper himself was unable to supply any answer

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<sup>6</sup> *Lincoln, Stamford, and Rutland Mercury*, January 20, 1837.

to this question. Yet the following passages clearly reveal a trait of character which provides an explanation, for with reference to the Choral Society he naively confesses:

I say *I* did all this—for although *I* had a committee of performers that conferred together about the selection of choruses and solos for each concert as it drew nigh, *they* took no part in the real business of the society. *I* had all that to plan and execute for myself.<sup>7</sup>

And again:

Like every true reformer, *I* had to put down the authority of the imperfect, and put the authoritative perfect in its place. Over the company of raw amateurs—despite some grumbling—I succeeded in placing \* \* \* the most thoroughly experienced person in the music of Handel \* \* : as conductor, the best violinist in the city as leader.<sup>8</sup>

He made friends in Lincoln, however, as well as enemies. The most prominent of these was Charles Seeley, later for many years M. P. from Lincoln, but at this time a successful young business man. With Gilbert Collins, a bank clerk and keen student of Greek, Cooper began the study of an Arabic grammar, but when George Boole,<sup>9</sup> a distant relative by marriage, and later professor of mathematics at Queens College, Cork, humorously inquired where they were to obtain any Arabic books, or the money to purchase an Arabic dictionary, they decided to abandon the enterprise.

Returning to the subject of Cooper's newspaper work, the proprietor of the *Mercury* was by this time so much impressed by the ability of his young Lincoln correspondent that, alarmed by his going off to London on a holiday, he requested Cooper and his wife to come to live in his house at Stamford, intimating that he meant to retire, and give up the management of the paper to his energetic assistant after he had "put him in the way of it a little." But this

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 107-108.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper dedicated his romance *Captain Cobler* [1850] to Boole "as an humble tribute to his genius and learning."

promising position never amounted to anything, for Mr. Newcomb could not bring himself to give up the management of his paper to another; grew angry when Cooper asked for a larger share of responsibility; and at last kept him in the counting-house as a clerk and would not permit him to write a single line. Cooper impatiently, and from the standpoint of his future prospects, foolishly, rebelled at this state of affairs; gave notice; and on the first of June, 1839, set off by stage coach to try his fortune in London. He gave up a position paying a salary of £250 a year, in addition to two rooms with coals rent free in Newcomb's house, in order to achieve fame and fortune in the great city, principally by means of an unfinished novel, and a slight acquaintance with Bulwer-Lytton.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the first part of a proposed three volume novel [eventually published in 1850 as *Captain Cobler*] and to the unimportant first volume of poetry previously considered [which contained, however, several pieces written before leaving Gainsborough] Cooper composed at Lincoln in 1835 the *Songs of the Gosherd* and of the *Swineherd*, and in 1836 the "Daughter of Plantagent", all three of which were later incorporated into the *Baron's Yule Feast* (1846).

The title and plan of his principal poetical work were also conceived in Lincoln. He had kept in his heart after the fiasco of the *Wesleyan Chiefs* the resolve that he would one day write a poem that should not fail. He says:

I used often to ask myself, 'What shall the subject be? \* \* \* The answer came suddenly to my mind one day as I sat in one of the recesses of the windows of the old Guildhall, attending a meeting of the town council \* \* \* I conceived, as it seemed in a moment, the creation of either a drama or an epic wherein the spirit of suicidal kings, and other remarkable personages, should be the interlocutors on some high theme, or themes; and resolved to call it "The Pur-

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<sup>10</sup> Cooper stated elsewhere: "Owing to family circumstances of a disagreeable nature to which I shall not now further allude, I was induced to leave Stamford—and ventured on London depending chiefly on promises of help given me by a literary baronet." *Address to the Jury by Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist, at the Stafford Special Assizes, on Wednesday, October 11, 1842, on a Charge of Arson, followed by an Acquittal*, Leicester, n. d., p. 14.

gatory of Suicides." I wrote down on one of the leaves of my reporting book the names of Demosthenes, and Hannibal, and Brutus, and Cassius, and Cato, and Nero, and Achitophel, and Judas Iscariot, and Castlereagh, and others, at the time, and preserved the leaf. I also kept the title before me, and never thought of changing it for one moment.<sup>11</sup>

The genesis of the poem, therefore, seems literally to have been an inspiration.

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<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 115.

## CHAPTER V

### LONDON VENTURE

Before leaving Lincoln Cooper had frequently reported the election and other speeches of Edward Lytton Bulwer, as he was at first called, and as a Radical he worked in support of Bulwer's candidacy for Lincoln.<sup>1</sup> He therefore "hoped for a little introductory help in London from the literary baronet and Liberal M. P."<sup>2</sup> and early found occasion to call at his house in Mayfair, a manuscript copy of his unfinished romance under his arm. Mr. Bulwer received him graciously, and assured him that he would submit the manuscript to his own publishers, Saunders & Otley. Seven weeks passed, and although Cooper called two or three times he was not able to see Lytton again. Finally he wrote stating that he would wait upon him at a specified hour, and this time Bulwer received him.

He came hastily into the room where I waited [Cooper writes], put the manuscript into my hands, and said, "I regret to say that although Messrs. Saunders & Otley consider it a work of merit, they have so many other things on hand that they cannot receive it at present. Good morning, Mr. Cooper."—and he bowed and disappeared through the folding doors into another room in an instant. His servant opened the door behind me, as I stood staring, and showed me the way into the street.<sup>3</sup>

One cannot help feeling a certain sympathy for the harassed author-politician,<sup>3a</sup> and even admiration for the efficient manner in which he extricated himself from an

<sup>1</sup> When the constituency of St. Ives, from which he was first elected, was abolished by the Reform Bill, Bulwer offered himself at Lincoln, and he represented that borough from 1832 until his temporary retirement from political life in 1841.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124 Cf. *Address to the Jury*, etc. (1842).

<sup>3a</sup> That this was not the only incident of the kind is indicated by the following passage from a brilliant recent biography of Bulwer: "Because his days were filled to the last minute, and his crowded programme planned for some while ahead, he tended to regard every encounter as a sort of business occasion, when some-

embarrassing interview. Nevertheless Cooper was justified in complaining that Bulwer should either have—kindly told me one truth, that my writing was too faulty for publication, and I had better try to achieve a more perfect work before I sought a publisher, or \* \* \* honestly told me another truth, that he had never shown my poor manuscript to Messrs. S. & O., and did not choose to take any trouble on my behalf.<sup>4</sup>

Under the title of "London Venture; or the Old Story Over Again," he used this incident as the basis of one of the sketches later published under the title of *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*. This account differs somewhat from that given in the autobiography and *Address to the Jury* in that there is no final dramatic interview, although Bulwer's neglect to submit the manuscript to a publisher is mentioned.

Upon their arrival in London Cooper and his wife settled in lodgings first at Southwark, where they discovered his boyhood friend Thomas Miller, already an author with several books to his credit.<sup>5</sup> But Miller, who was then engaged in the composition of *Lady Jane Grey*, his third romance for the publisher Colburn, was not at this time able to help Cooper into any literary employment.

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thing had to be arranged. Once the point at issue was clear, he would break off and rush to his next duty, leaving his late companion with a faint sense of having been used and thrown aside. \* \* \* Hence there arose the legend of Bulwer as an affected, heartless egoist—a legend which \* \* \* was destined to haunt his reputation to the day of his death and even beyond." Sadleir, Michael, *Edward and Rosina 1803-1806*, Boston, 1931, pp. 321-322.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> Miller entered upon a literary career in the following fashion: "While working at his trade of basket-making in Nottingham he submitted his poems to Thomas Bailey, a journalist, whose son was the author of *Festus*; and Bailey encouraged Miller to publish *Songs of the Sea Nymphs* [1832]. Shortly afterwards he removed to London, hoping to contribute to the magazines; but he had a weary wait for recognition, and had to earn his living by working at his old trade. Having one day sent to Lady Blessington some baskets containing verses, he was welcomed at her house. 'Often,' he wrote, 'have I been sitting in Lady Blessington's splendid drawing room in the morning, and talking and laughing as familiarly as in the old house at home; and on the same evening I might have been seen on Westminster Bridge, between an apple vendor and a baked-potato merchant, selling my baskets.' About 1845 he was enabled, mainly through the assistance of Samuel Rogers, to start

A Lincolnshire acquaintance, Sir Culling Eardley Smith, finally sent Cooper a letter of introduction to Josiah Conder, editor of the *Patriot*. This led to further introductions to other editors, and finally to the earning of "perhaps five pounds by contributing reviews and prose sketches" to Southgate's fleeting publications, the *Sunbeam* and the *Probe*.<sup>6</sup>

The little money which he had brought with him to London was now gone, and it became necessary for him to sell the library of books which he had brought with him. The dealer who purchased them, Mr. Lumley, of Chancery Lane, not only paid liberal prices, but observing Cooper to be in need, engaged him to do copying at the library of the British Museum, and to assist in the preparation of catalogs of second-hand books, many thousands of which he sold in America at this time.

By means of this employment, and the sale of all the books he had brought from Lincolnshire—about five hundred volumes great and small—Cooper just managed

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business as a bookseller and publisher in Newgate Street; but failing to succeed, soon devoted himself entirely to writing. Ultimately he produced not fewer than forty-five volumes, including several works of fiction in which country characters and scenes are drawn with skill. \* \* \* A volume of *Rural Sketches* was largely circulated, as were most of his books dealing with the country. He contributed leading articles to the London daily papers, reviews to the *Athenaeum*, and much miscellaneous prose and poetry to the periodicals, but died in poverty." [Chambers Cyclopedie of Literature, ii: 377] Cooper, when he wrote his autobiography, made an appeal for his old friend, then, like himself, past three-score; saying that he had "written forty books in his time, all tending to improve working men's minds," yet at the end of it all found himself ill and destitute (*Life*, p. 124) Cooper referred to Miller again in *Thoughts at Fourscore*, observing, "Such are the vicissitudes of a literary life, in too many instances, that although he had written nearly fifty books of light literature, he fell into the deepest poverty in his last days. Mr. Disraeli compassionately sent him £100 from the Treasury, while he was on his death-bed; but it came nearly too late." [p. 372] Miller died in 1874. Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton's diary (December 16, 1835) contains an interesting account of her impressions of "the English Burns and Nottingham basket-maker." [Lytton, *Life of Edward Bulwer*, i; 330-331]. In his reminiscences Henry Vizately, who had known and employed Miller, gives a long but prejudiced and undependable account of him [*Glances Back Through Seventy Years*, i; 308-309].

<sup>6</sup> *Life*, p. 125. Both these ephemeral publications have completely disappeared.

to keep his head above water. He had tried to continue his studies in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and German, but had to desist when all of his grammars and dictionaries were gone.

It was at this time that he wrote the two sketches which appeared at the end of *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*. These were originally intended to form the opening chapters of an autobiographical novel,<sup>7</sup> but owing to the difficulty of earning a living and his lack of leisure the work was never carried beyond the two introductory sketches.

Yet though they were so often at low-water mark, Cooper and his wife kept up their spirits, accepting hardship as the price of success, and a traditional part of "London Adventure." They amused themselves by exploring the highways and byways of London, looking into the shop windows, and attending the churches of popular London preachers. Cooper was present also at the opening of the new Socialist headquarters at John Street and Tottenham Court Road, where he heard Robert Owen deliver the first lecture from a platform which he himself was to occupy later on many different occasions. The following Sunday he found himself sitting next to the Socialist leader in the gallery at John Street, listening to the popular Unitarian preacher W. J. Fox, later an M. P. and Cooper's good friend, lecture on the "System of Robert Owen."<sup>8</sup>

Cooper had now been in London almost a year, from June 1839 to March 1840. His savings were dissipated and his books sold, yet he was still unable to find any regular employment. He had finally to resort to the pawnshop, and articles of clothing, his traveling cloak, his father's old silver watch, and everything movable which could possibly be spared, all found their way into the hands

<sup>7</sup> See Preface to *Old Fashioned Stories*.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Owen's letter to Fox, expressing his dissatisfaction with what he heard, a most interesting and characteristic communication, may be read in Richard Garnett's *Life of W. J. Fox, Public Teacher and Social Reformer*, London, 1910, p. 254-255.

of the money-lender before deliverance finally arrived as the result of replying to a newspaper advertisement.

The position thus obtained was that of editor of a four-page weekly newspaper, the *Kentish Mercury, Gravesend Journal, and Greenwich, and Surrey Gazette*.<sup>9</sup> According to an announcement just beneath the sesquipedalian title, this little paper, which sold for 5d, circulated to Canterbury, Chatham, Cranbrook, Croyden, Dartford, Deal, Deptford, Dorking, Dover, Epsom, Foldstone, Gravesend, Hithe, Kingston, Maidstone, Margate, Ramsgate, Reigate, Richmond, Rochester, Romney, Sheerness, Sittingbourne, and Tunbridge Wells. Despite this far-flung distribution the editor's salary was only three pounds per week. The publication was made up principally of brief local items sent in by various correspondents or reported by Cooper himself. In the *Kentish Mercury* section these were further grouped under the names of different Kentish towns. The *Greenwich Gazette* consisted usually of about three columns of local paragraphs and the *Surrey Gazette* of about one column, the rest of the paper constituting the *Gravesend Journal*. Notices of births, deaths and marriages, hop intelligence [a necessity in Kent], two to four columns of editorials, letters from correspondents, brief selections of poetry, and part of a column of foreign and colonial news formed the usual contents. As the paper was printed in London, in order to justify its claim to being a Kentish periodical the proprietor insisted that it be edited in Kent. The Coopers accordingly moved to Greenwich, from which place the new editor went up to London by steamer once or twice a week to see the paper through the press.

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<sup>9</sup> The file of this newspaper in the British Museum is endorsed on the first page in ink beginning with the issue of July 4, 1840 "Thomas Cooper, Publisher, 15, Stockwell Street, Greenwich," and this endorsement in Cooper's handwriting appears every week thereafter until September 26, 1840, the end of the quarter—thirteen issues in all. On the date mentioned the price of the paper was reduced to 4d, and the files for the ensuing quarter are endorsed by the printer, D. McGowan, of 16 Great Windmill Street, London.

Cooper appears to have entered upon his editorial duties about the first of May, 1840, as the issue of May 9 contained an announcement that the paper had been placed under new superintendence. In this same number there is also a half-column review of Thomas Miller's recently published romance *Gideon Giles the Roper*, pretty conclusive evidence that by this date Cooper was already in charge. For this paper he prepared a series of eight articles on "Kentish Preachers," but like most sequels these were neither so popular nor so interesting as the first writing had been, and Cooper in his autobiography does not mention them.

The proprietor of the paper was William Dougal Christie, remembered for his excellent studies of Shaftesbury and Dryden. He was at that time a young barrister with rooms in the Temple, and a little later M. P. from Weymouth. Like his editor, Christie was a man of hot temper and decided opinions.

Cooper drew upon his experiences in Kent, and the knowledge he gained of the county from circulating about it as a journalist, for another of the sketches in *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*, that entitled "The Intellectual Lever that Lacked a Fulcrum," which tells how a politically ambitious Mr. Mortimer toured Kent to discover the best place to set up a newspaper to help his election to Parliament, visiting several of the places mentioned in the heading of the Christie publication. After purchasing a broken-down press he discovered that he had been swindled, and that "a new newspaper for Kent \* \* \* was of all schemes the most foolish." That Christie was the original of Mr. Mortimer seems certain in view not only of general resemblances in character and circumstance, but from such particular similarities as insistence upon the fictitious paper's being published in Kent, the time of the action ["the autumn of 1842"], and the parliamentary ambitions of the principal character.

At the end of six months Cooper resigned his position in order to accept a place on the *Leicestershire Mercury*.

Though it was never self-supporting, the circulation of the Kentish paper had increased from 25,550 at the beginning of the quarter when Cooper assumed charge to 49,010 by the end of June.<sup>10</sup> In the autobiography Cooper intimates that his resignation was prompted in part by the fact that he and the proprietor did not agree in their notions regarding the management of the paper.<sup>11</sup> In 1842 he told the Staffordshire jury that he had "remained on the paper until the prospect of retrieving it from ruin was gone," and that after he left, it became extinct.<sup>12</sup>

Two days after he had severed his connection with the *Kentish Mercury*, i.e. on November 23, 1840, Cooper set out for Leicester to begin his work with the *Leicestershire Mercury*. His reasons for this step he summed up two years afterwards as follows:

Leicester was my birth place, and although I had not seen it since infancy I was romantic enough to feel an ideal attachment to my native town. I also wished to be near my aging mother, whose increasing infirmities warned me that she would soon quit this stage of existence. These reasons, added to the information that the paper I was invited to assist was ultra-democratic in its principals, induced me to remove at once to Leicester.<sup>13</sup>

He had felt, moreover, for many years a peculiar impression that he had "something to do of a stirring and important nature in Leicester."<sup>14</sup> When, therefore, he received through the kindness of a Lincoln minister a letter from the manager of the *Leicestershire Mercury* inquiring as to the whereabouts of the man who had written the articles on Lincoln preachers, he was convinced that this was a message of destiny. As the new position was not an editorial one, and represented a loss in salary of a pound a week, it might seem a coming down in the world instead of the opportunity so confidently expected, but

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Kentish Mercury*, etc. of May 9 and December 19, 1840. These figures evidently represent the *total* quarterly circulation in each instance.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> *Address to the Jury*, etc. p. 15

<sup>13</sup> *Address to the Jury*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, p. 132.

Cooper felt that his intuition was eventually justified, as it was at Leicester that he entered Chartism, an action which affected his whole after life.

It will be noted that up to this time, and he was now thirty-five years old, Cooper had displayed little interest in the movement for wider political rights, or in the struggle against the New Poor Law, agitations which were at this time convulsing the industrial centers of England. The reasons for this were three-fold.

In the first place his failure to appreciate the misery of England's industrial population was due to his hitherto total lack of acquaintance with it. Previous to his coming to Leicester he had had no first-hand experience with the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, for he had never come into personal contact with factory workers and factory conditions in any large industrial center.

Another reason for his aloofness was his early religious training. Among the Nonconformist sects, particularly among the Methodists, preoccupation with religious matters usually meant indifference if not active hostility to contemporary social and political agitation. Such worldly interests tended, it was held, to distract the believer's attention from the eternal verities to a concern with the purely temporal and transitory conditions of this life.

A third reason for lack of interest hitherto in the class struggle was Cooper's intense concentration during his early years upon self-improvement. The student lives in a world of his own, and not infrequently has little concern with the affairs of the world about him. "At this period," writes Miss Lockwood, "Cooper showed no understanding of the place of a workman as such in society. He was really craving an escape, and though he was teaching workmen, for he was filled with a passion to illumine their dark lives, he was often remote from their problem as it was developing by 1827 when he gave up his trade. \* \* \* His ideal was the old classical one of personal excellence, high

and noble in its day, but inadequate in the new world where the workers to attain it must sacrifice their health.”<sup>15</sup>

But by 1840 when Cooper went to Leicester the forces of self-education and of religious enthusiasm had, for the time being, lost their drive. He had now to work continually to earn a living, he had lost all his books, and he had severed his connection with Methodism. For perhaps the first time he was sufficiently detached to be deeply impressed by the terrible social misery which he found in Leicester, and to become enthusiastically converted to Chartism as the remedy for such conditions. It will be recalled that the decade then commencing was one of such deep misery for the working population of England as to be still popularly known as the “Hungry Forties.”

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<sup>15</sup> Lockwood, H. D. *Tools and the Man* [Columbia Studies in English, etc.] N. Y., 1927, p. 30.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LEICESTER STOCKINGERS

Until his coming to Leicester Cooper had never investigated Chartism or attended a Chartist meeting. He had seen references to the movement in the newspapers, but he had never met with anyone who maintained Chartist opinions.

About the beginning of December, 1840, he was sent by the *Leicestershire Mercury* to report a Chartist lecture at the local headquarters of the National Chartist Association. The speaker was John Mason,<sup>1</sup> a Birmingham shoemaker, and one of the early leaders of Chartism in that city. His speech, which was delivered with great energy and some eloquence, was on the whole sober and reasonable.

Cooper's newspaper report of the meeting, headed merely "Chartist Lecture", appeared in the *Leicestershire Mercury* of December 5, 1840. It contained no mention of the following dramatic peroration, which in the autobiography is put into Mason's mouth:

"Not that the Corn Law Repeal is wrong," said he; "when we get the Charter we will repeal the Corn Laws and all the other bad laws. But if you give up your agitation for the Charter to help the Free Traders, they will not help you to get the Charter. Don't be deceived by the middle classes again. You helped them to get their votes—you swelled the cry of "The bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill!" But where are the fine promises they made you? Gone to the winds. They said when they had gotten their votes they would help you to get yours. But they and the rotten Whigs have never remembered you. Municipal reform has been for their benefit—not for yours. All other reforms the Whigs boast to have effected have been for the benefit of the middle-

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<sup>1</sup> Gammage describes Mason as a very rousing and rapid speaker, whose declamation was powerful, and whose speeches were generally interspersed with useful facts and arguments. He was twice arrested, but was acquitted each time. In 1849 he emigrated to America.

classes—not for yours. And now they want to get the Corn Laws repealed—not for your benefit—but for their own. “Cheap Bread,” they cry. But they mean “Low Wages.” Do not listen to their cant. Stick to your Charter. You are veritable slaves without your votes.”<sup>2</sup>

This speech, which sums up the point at issue between Chartist and Free Trader so clearly that it has been quoted by three students of the period, is not a reproduction of what Mason said, for no such statements occur in the contemporary report of the meeting. Rather it is a forcible statement of Cooper’s own subsequent sentiments.

Thanks to the radical brushmakers of Gainsborough, Mason’s political doctrine was not wholly unfamiliar to the *Mercury*’s reporter. But if the principles were not new, the terrible poverty of the workers was. Until now he had never actually realized the condition of the manufacturing population of the North. He found it—

utterly unlike \* \* \* to the earlier old Lincolnshire life that I had known, wherein I mingled with the poor and saw a deal of their suffering, yet witnessed not merely the respect usually subsisting between master and servant, but in many instances the strong attachment of the peasantry to the farmers, and of the farmers to their landlords.<sup>3</sup>

“The fierce and open opposition in public meetings of working men to employers, manifested in derisive cries, hissing and hooting, and shouts of scorn” seemed to him at first “an appalling fact.”<sup>4</sup>

When Cooper left the small room where the Chartist lecture had been given, it was eleven o’clock. Some twenty ragged men had been the only audience, and he set out for home in company with three or four of them. As they passed along the deserted streets he noted with surprise that the upper windows of the meaner houses were all lighted, and although the hour was drawing on to midnight, the loud creak of the stocking frame could be

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

plainly heard as the group passed by. Turning to one of his companions Cooper inquired:

"Do your stocking weavers often work so late as this?"

"No, not often: work's over scarce for that," was the reply, "but we're glad to work any hour, when we can get work to do."

"Then your hosiery trade is not good in Leicester?" I observed.

"Good! It's been good for nought this many a year. \* \* \* We've a bit of a spurt now and then, but we soon go back to starvation!"

"And what may be the average earnings of a stocking weaver?" I asked. "I mean when a man is fully employed."

"About four and sixpence," was the reply. \* \* \*

"Four and sixpence," said I, "well, six fours are twenty-four, and six sixpences are three shillings; that's seven-and-twenty shillings a week. The wages are not so bad when you are in work."

"What are you talking about?" said they. "You mean four and sixpence a day; but we mean four and sixpence a week."

"Four and sixpence a week!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean that men have to work on those stocking frames that I hear going now for four and sixpence! How can they maintain their wives and children?"<sup>5</sup>

Cooper then proceeds to give some account of the conditions which brought about this terrible poverty among the stockingers. His account is confirmed by the report of the Parliamentary commission which in 1844-45 carried on an investigation of the whole stocking industry.<sup>6</sup> The principal cause of the trouble, as Cooper pointed out, was the system of frame rent. The stockings were knit on a special loom called a "frame", too expensive both in first cost and in maintenance for the operative to buy. He therefore rented his frame at a certain fixed sum weekly. But as a rule he did not deal directly with the wholesale merchant. In most cases the wholesale hosier found it more convenient and profitable to let out the frames in lots of from twenty to fifty to small masters or "bagmen". These middle men rented out single frames to the stocking

<sup>5</sup> *Life*, pp. 138-139. Cf. *Address to the Jury*, p. 15 (1842) where the above dialogue appears with very little change.

<sup>6</sup> The findings of this Commission (Parliamentary Papers, 1845, xv) are admirably summarized by Mark Hovell in *The Chartist Movement* [Publications of the University of Manchester, Historical Series No. xxxi] 1925, pp. 18-22. The writer acknowledges his indebtedness to this source in the paragraphs which follow.

weavers, at an advance of course over the rent they themselves paid. They also distributed the yarn, which they received from the wholesale dealer, and again added a charge for their "service". In addition to the frame rent there was a charge for oiling it, another for giving out the work, and a third to cover the services of a female seamer. Usually there was a deduction also for alleged faults in the knitting. Not infrequently these petty charges amounted to thirty or forty per cent of the wages due. A form of exploitation which Cooper condemned particularly for its meanness was the practice of letting out work which might have been sufficient for one knitter for a week to three different knitters, and then collecting for a full week's frame rent from each of the three. The Parliamentary inquiry disclosed some cases, indeed, where the knitters received no wages at all, owing to the iniquities of the "truck system", another form of profiteering common amongst the bagmen. There was never any lack of stocking knitters, however, as the industry had ceased to be a skilled trade to which an apprenticeship had to be served. Furthermore, owing to the fluctuating demands of fashion, specialty manufacturers were able on occasion to offer excellent wages for unskilled labor. The influx of new workers which followed these brief periods of prosperity merely served to swell the mounting total of misery and unemployment in Leicester, Nottingham, and other knitting centers when the demand for hosiery again slackened.

That something was wrong with a system which produced for the actual worker the merest pittance, and placed on his back the support of both frame owner and middleman, was obvious enough, and to the ignorant, and in large part illiterate, body of hungry and ragged stockingers the Six Points of the Charter seemed to offer an equally obvious remedy.

The conversation previously recorded, Cooper declares, "was the first utterance that revealed to me the real state of suffering in which thousands in England were living."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Life*, p. 138.

During the first week after his coming to Leicester, he had had, he writes:

so little to fill my mind, or even to occupy my time, that I proposed returning in right earnest to my studies, so soon as I could possess myself of the requisite books. But the more I learned of the state of the poor, the less inclined I felt to settle down to study. The accounts of wretchedness and petty oppression \* \* \* kept me in perpetual uneasiness, and set me thinking what I ought to do. The issue was that I resolved to become a champion of the poor. "What is the acquirement of languages—what is the obtaining of all knowledge," I said to myself, "compared to the real honor, whatever seeming disgrace it may bring, of struggling to win the social and political rights of millions?"<sup>6</sup>

He had at last discovered his life work, and henceforth until his death he remained a teacher, leader, and preacher amongst the industrial masses of England.

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<sup>6</sup> *Life*, pp. 146-147.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHARTISM: THE FIRST PHASE

Cooper's connection with Chartism, while it colored his whole subsequent career, and bestowed upon him the appellation by which he is still remembered, was actually of brief duration. He did not enter the movement until after it had passed its apogee; and his quarrel with O'Connor after he was released from prison prevented his taking any prominent part in Chartist affairs after 1846. In order that his Chartist activities may be more clearly understood it seems desirable to include at this point a brief description of how this movement came into being, and what it had accomplished up to this time.

Chartism, "the first movement of modern times to be engineered and controlled by workmen,"<sup>1</sup> was fundamentally an effort to gain votes for the working class. It was the direct descendant of the elder radical movement at the end of the eighteenth century, which had received the support of such distinguished persons as the Duke of Richmond, Charles James Fox, and Charles Grey, afterwards the Earl Grey of the Reform Bill.

The movement languished during the Napoleonic wars, but after the peace it sprang up with renewed vigor. In the great struggle for the enfranchisement of the middle class, culminating in the Reform Bill of 1832, which was strongly supported by the manufacturing capitalists, the embattled Whigs had not been at all reluctant that "the shadow of the working-class should loom behind them an ominous ally in reserve,"<sup>2</sup> but they never seriously contemplated granting the vote to their ragged supporters. Even a Whig of Macaulay's intelligence viewed with panic

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<sup>1</sup> Hovell, M. *op. cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> Trevelyan, G. M. *Life of John Bright*, London, 1913. p. 60.

the prospect of placing political power in the hands of potential Jacobins.

The passing of the Reform Bill was a great step—whether forward or backward is a matter of opinion—in the transition of England from a peasant to an industrial society, and from aristocratic to democratic institutions. It enabled the middle classes whom it enfranchised to make the Whig party dominant politically from 1830 to 1852, save for the six years of the Conservative Peel ministries [1834–1835 and 1841–1846]. This was the party in power, therefore, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and it was cordially hated by the working class on two counts, first as the creator of the harsh new Poor Laws, and secondly as a party which had hypocritically used the threat of the masses against the Tory government to extort the enfranchisement of the middle class, and then not merely deserted its allies but begun a bitter campaign of persecution against them when they continued to agitate for further extension of the franchise. The early Chartists, and this was particularly true of Cooper, neither sought nor accepted any help from the middle classes.

The New Poor Law was designed to remedy the demoralizing practice of supplementing wages out of the rates, which during the hard times resulting from the war had been extended until, in the southern counties especially, the great mass of laboring poor had been converted into paupers. Such a state subsidy placed a premium on idleness and thriftlessness, and still further depressed the wretched wages of both urban and rural labor. Unfortunately the transition to the new system was carried through with a ruthless and doctrinaire disregard of the human side of the problem, and while the rigor with which the new law was enforced may have been beneficial in the long run, any such future gain was purchased at the price of much immediate suffering. The three Commissioners who administered the new law proceeded on the principle that life in the workhouse should be made more unpleasant

than a life of free labor beyond its walls, a theory which worked especially grave injustice upon the aged and sick, who were subjected to the same rigors as those who had come to the workhouse through their own fault.<sup>3</sup>

Even before the rise of Chartism the fight against the Poor Laws had raged violently in the manufacturing districts of the north. In certain towns [Todmorden, for example] the new regulations could not be put into operation; and the agitation against them in Lancashire and Yorkshire under the leadership of Richard Oastler, who began as an agitator against child labor, and John Raynor Stephens, a Methodist minister [eventually expelled] who denounced the cruel laws with all the religious passion and ruthlessness of an Old Testament prophet, assumed practically the character of a rebellion.

The anger of the working classes at the new Poor Law, and the political impotence of that anger, was, therefore, a powerful stimulus to the growth of Chartism. But when the anti-Poor Law movement passed over into Chartism it ceased to be simply negative protest and acquired a positive program. Hovell believes that it was the northern Chartists who, by retaining the violent methods and incendiary program which had marked their agitation against the Poor Law, gave to Chartism that tumultuous aspect by which to most people it is best known.<sup>4</sup>

It is evident, then, that although political enfranchisement was ostensibly the object of the Chartist movement, its real motive power was a sense of grievance which was far more social than political in its origin. From the beginning, indeed, there is in Chartism this double strand of political and economic reform. While on the surface it may appear to be merely a continuation of the demand for Parliamentary reform which had been advanced by Cartwright in the previous century, the underlying motives and

<sup>3</sup> Trevelyan, G. M. *History of England*, London, 1927. p. 642.

<sup>4</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, chap. V. The whole of this chapter "The Agitation Against the New Poor Law" is highly recommended to anyone interested in a more detailed consideration of this subject.

the character of the agitation were social. These two objects, political and economic reform, were not incompatible; yet in an age when the mass of the wage-earning class was without either organization or political experience, they were not easily pursued together; and it was, in fact, the conflicting interests of economic reform and political democracy which ultimately broke up the Chartist movement.

Chartism first came into existence in 1837. The bad harvests of that year, and the bad trade by which they were accompanied, brought ever deepening wretchedness to the agricultural worker in the country and to the industrial poor in the cities. "Misery turned the thoughts of the working class to their invidious exclusion from political rights, and recalling the old Radical program from oblivion, they embodied its five points in a document which became famous as the People's Charter."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, although the demands of the Charter concerned themselves solely with changes in the political machinery, the movement, as previously pointed out, was fundamentally social and economic. "The avidity with which the populace of Lancashire flung itself at the anything but succulent Six Points was due to no political creed. It was caused by hunger and fear."<sup>6</sup> In the words of Joseph Raynor Stephens, the Charter "was not a political question, but a knife and fork question; not a matter of ballot boxes, but of bread and butter"; or, as a modern economist has phrased it, Chartism was "a revolt against capitalism,—an attempt to make possible a social revolution by the overthrow of a political oligarchy."<sup>7</sup> Its main factor was "a bitter

<sup>5</sup> Monypenny, W. F. and Buckle, G. E., *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli* [Rvd. edn.] N. Y. 1929 (two vols.) i; 479. In the 1839 National Petition for the Charter only five of the six points are mentioned; hence this and other references to the five points of the Charter.

<sup>6</sup> West, Julius, *A History of the Chartist Movement*, London, 1920, pp. 186-187.

<sup>7</sup> Tawney, R. H., *Preface to Life and Struggles of William Lovett in his pursuit of bread, knowledge, and freedom; with some account of the different associations he belonged to*, London, 1920. [two vols.]

sense of injustice and misery, with a conviction that the rich were in some way responsible.”<sup>8</sup>

The organization which produced the Charter, and thus inaugurated the Chartist movement, was the Working Men’s Association of London, formed by William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, and a few others, all working artisans, on the 16th of June, 1832.

From the beginning, the life and soul of the Working Men’s Association was its Secretary, William Lovett, the “moral force” leader. Having in mind the blind idolatry of the mob for Oastler and Stephens, and the consequent excesses of these men, and remembering also the disillusion which had followed the passage of the first Reform Bill, Lovett declared against middle class leadership, or, in fact, the undue exaltation of any leaders. He was insistent also upon securing political reform, and not being “led away by promises of repealing the detested Poor Law, or any of other infamous laws which Whigs and Tories have united to enact \* \* \* unless the promise be accompanied by the pledge of universal suffrage, and all the other great essentials of self-government.”<sup>9</sup>

Although the principal object of the Working Men’s Association was parliamentary reform, it also agitated for freedom of the press and a national system of education. The method adopted to accomplish these aims was education and propaganda. From the early months of 1837 on it employed “missionaries” who by the end of the year had founded more than one hundred branches in different parts of the country.

The principal missionary during these preliminary operations was Henry Hetherington, whose name is inseparably connected with the battle for an unstamped press. “Up to 1836 the average price of an English journal was seven pence, and \* \* \* frugal and law-abiding people rarely indulged in that costly luxury except on Saturday or Sun-

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<sup>8</sup> Trail, H. D., *Social England*, vi; 225.

<sup>9</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, p. 122.

day."<sup>10</sup> The cause of this high price was the parliamentary tax,<sup>11</sup> to evade which and at the same time provide political information for the people Hetherington began the publication of a *Penny Paper for the People*, first issued daily and then weekly in the form of letters addressed to different individuals. After his first conviction for non-payment of the stamp tax Hetherington changed the name of his paper to that of *Poor Man's Guardian* and published it in open and avowed defiance of the law. The Stamp Office took up the challenge, and waged a fierce war against the publication, imprisoning not only its publisher, but all newsdealers or book-agents who sold it.<sup>12</sup> This contest with the government lasted for about five years, "during which time upwards of five hundred persons in different parts of the kingdom suffered imprisonment for the publication or sale of \* \* \* Radical publications."<sup>13</sup> Fined, imprisoned, hunted as an outlaw, Hetherington at last defeated the government, obtaining from a special jury on June 17, 1834, the verdict that his *Poor Man's Guardian* was a strictly legal publication, a stultification of the law which was due to Hetherington's proof that his persecutors habitually allowed such expensive journals as the *Lancet* and *Athenaeum* to circulate unstamped and unpersecuted. This verdict marked the beginning of the end of the 4d. stamp duty.

It was Lovett's opinion that:

the unstamped publications may be said to have originated the cheap literature of the present day \* \* \* for many of the cheap literary and scientific publications that were published during that period were

<sup>10</sup> Rose, J. Holland, *Rise and Growth of Democracy in Great Britain*, N. Y., 1898, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> The newspaper tax began in 1712 at 1d. It rose to 1½d. in 1756, 2d. in 1789, 2½d in 1795, 3½d. in 1804, and 4d. in 1815. As a result of Hetherington's campaign it was in 1836 again reduced to 1d, and finally removed entirely in 1855. See West *op. cit.*, p. 49; also Holyoake, G. J. *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, London, 1900 (two vols.) 1; chaps. 52-54.

<sup>12</sup> Rose, J. Holland. [*op. cit.* p. 72] has described the methods employed to smuggle the paper into circulation and the campaign of persecution against its agents. See also *Life and Character of Henry Hetherington from the Eloge by Thomas Cooper*, etc., London, 1849, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, pp. 61-62.

started with the avowed intention of 'diverting the minds of the working classes away from politics,' and of giving them 'more useful knowledge.' In fact a new class of literature sprang up for the first time in England avowedly for the millions \* \* \* To this cheap literature, and the subsequent cheap newspapers that resulted from our warfare, may also be traced the great extension of coffee-rooms and reading rooms of our large towns, and the mental and moral improvements resulting from their establishment."<sup>14</sup>

Hovell points out that Lovett and Hetherington [and he might have added Thomas Cooper] were:

intellectual men whom modern education would have lifted into quite other spheres of life, where their abilities would have found that expression which political agitation alone seemed to offer in their own day. They were men driven into revolutionary thought by the appalling misery which they saw around them \* \* \* A feeling of baffled helplessness in the face of the massed array of vested interests, ignorance, prejudice, and conservatism added bitterness to their thoughts. But a horror of violence, of bloodshed, and of hate, deprived them of that callous, calculating recklessness which is essential to the physical force revolutionary, and they were helpless in the face of such men when the movement \* \* \* took on the nature of a physical force demonstration.<sup>15</sup>

To return to the People's Charter, this came into being in the following fashion. In February 1837 a public meeting was held at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand under the auspices of the London Working Men's Association. At this meeting there was submitted for the approval of the assembled gathering a previously prepared petition to Parliament, and the desired approval having been unanimously expressed, about three thousand signatures were immediately appended. The prayer of the petition was in the form of "a brief outline of a Bill em-

<sup>14</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, pp. 63-64.

Lovett's opinion was that of Linton also. "Neither the Diffusion Society's *Penny Magazine* nor its follower the Christian-promoting *Saturday*, with other 'Information for the People.' [Chambers']—to wit], had perhaps appeared but for the sake of countering the influence of the new cheap literature of Watson, Hetherington, Cleave, Heywood, and others." Linton, W. J. *James Watson, a memoir of the days of the fight for a free press in England and of the agitation for the People's Charter*, Manchester, n. d. p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, 59.

bodying the 'six points' \* \* \* [and] formed the nucleus of the far-famed People's Charter, which may be said to have had its origin at this meeting."<sup>16</sup>

The petition thus inaugurated was entrusted to John Arthur Roebuck, M. P. for presentation to the House. Desirous of having the support of other Radical members of Parliament, Roebuck suggested that they be invited to meet the Working Men's Association for the purpose of discussing the proposed petition. Such a meeting was accordingly arranged, and took place at the British Coffee House in Cockspur street.

By O'Connell's desire this first meeting adjourned without action, but at a second meeting<sup>17</sup> the following week resolutions were adopted binding the attending M. P's to support and vote for electoral reform. A Committee of Twelve, six parliamentarians and six working men,<sup>17a</sup> which was authorized to draft the necessary bill appointed Roebuck and Lovett to perform this task. "With the exception of the Preamble, which was written by Roebuck, the bill was prepared by Lovett, after his having consulted Francis Place as to its form and legal technicalities."<sup>18</sup> Lovett's proposal for woman suffrage, which would have justified the commonly misapplied term of "universal" suffrage, was rejected, and a few other minor changes were

<sup>16</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, p. 105; cf. Rosenblatt, Frank F., *The Chartist Movement in its Social and Economic Aspects* [Columbia Univ. Studies in History, etc. lxxiii, No. 1] N. Y., 1916, pp. 89-90.

<sup>17</sup> A distorted conception of what happened at this meeting seems to have been responsible for the well-known story of O'Connell's handing the petition to Lovett with the words, "There, Lovett, is your Charter; agitate for it, and never be content with anything else." The reasoning of Julius West [*op. cit.*, Preface, p. 5] seems to demonstrate conclusively the falseness of this story, which has been repeated by Gammage, Martineau, Molesworth, Justin McCarthy, J. Holland Rose, and even by Theodore Rothstein in the recent [1929] *From Chartist to Labourism*.

<sup>17a</sup> For a list of the members of the Committee, and a discussion of the lack of cohesion between the Parliamentary Radicals and the Working Men's Association, see Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74; also Gammage, R. G. *History of the Chartist Movement*, London, 1854, pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenblatt, F., *op. cit.*, p. 95. For a discussion and disposal of Place's claims to have been the author of the Charter see West, J. *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.

suggested, after which the proposed bill was formally approved, first by the Committee of Twelve and then clause by clause in the London Association, and finally by the associations throughout the country. It was this bill as drawn by Lovett which received the name of the People's Charter.<sup>19</sup>

The proposed bill grouped its demands under six heads, the famous "six points" of the Charter. These demands were for universal adult male suffrage, voting by ballot,<sup>20</sup> equal parliamentary constituencies,<sup>21</sup> annual parliaments, the abolishment of property qualifications for members of parliament, and payment of members of parliament.

Owing to the death of William IV Parliament was dissolved soon after the meeting which had appointed the Committee of Twelve, and in the ensuing election Colonel Thompson, Sharmon Crawford, and J. A. Roebuck all lost their seats. This made it necessary to postpone for the time being all plans for introducing the proposed bill into Parliament.

In the spring of 1838 the Working Men's Association determined that it would be good strategy to inaugurate a general agitation in favor of the People's Charter throughout the country with a view to bringing pressure to bear upon Parliament. On May 8, 1838, they published the Charter and despatched copies to all parts of the kingdom, and shortly thereafter their allied associations in England and Scotland reached a total of 150. The program thus brought forward was almost immediately dubbed Chartistism, and it rapidly swallowed up all other radical movements previously in the field.

Factory Reform, Currency Reform, abolition of the new Poor Law, of Truck, of the Corn Laws—all these demands were buried in the great demand for democratic institutions through which the

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<sup>19</sup> Reproduced as Appendix B in the Rosenblatt monograph.

<sup>20</sup> Like Thomas Hughes and John Stuart Mill, Cooper regarded the secret ballot as cowardly, and favored a continuance of open voting.

<sup>21</sup> This point was omitted in the National Petition [Gammage, R. G. *op. cit.*, pp. 98-99].

just desires of the people might become law. Within six months of the publication of the Charter the larger part of the working classes were united under its standard. Few of the local leaders were able to resist the popularity of the Charter.<sup>22</sup>

But with this increase in popularity there came into the movement a new spirit, a new recklessness. The policy of Chartism as laid down by the Working Men's Association was appeal to public opinion by meetings, reports, addresses, and manifestos. Lovett, the founder and moving spirit of the original Association, stood like a rock for this policy of gradual reform through the pressure of enlightened public opinion. "Whatever is gained in England by force," wrote Lovett, "by force must be sustained, and whatever springs from knowledge and justice will sustain itself."<sup>23</sup> But to the great majority of his new followers "at a time when whole districts were living on the verge of starvation, and when the Government seized every opportunity to crush peaceful attempts at organization \* \* \* revolt seemed a more direct route than persuasion."<sup>24</sup>

The agitation for the Six Points continued to increase in fervor and in power, and enormous gatherings took place at Glasgow, Northampton, Birmingham, Manchester, and elsewhere to hear the missionaries of the Association. At these meetings physical force was in the ascendancy, and O'Connor [who talked of "fleshing swords to the hilt"] caused great apprehension, not only to an alarmed middle class but also to the London leaders of the Working Men's Association. They determined that their own demonstration in the metropolis should assume a different character. The high bailiff of Westminster consented to open their meeting, which was held in the Palace Yard, Westminster, on September 17, 1838, and the speakers included such distinguished Radicals as Colonel Thompson, W. J. Fox, Ebenezer Elliott, and two Members of Parliament. In point of numbers the 30,000 who attended compared un-

<sup>22</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Introduction, p. xiv.

favorably with the nearly 200,000 who had gathered at Birmingham. Feargus O'Connor appeared as one of the delegates from eighty-nine towns in England, Scotland, and Wales. He made a typically rambling and fiery address, and was easily the most popular orator of the day, though he was rivaled in his advocacy of physical force by Richardson of Manchester. Ebenezer Elliott, too, uttered strong protests against the oppressive measures of the Government, but all the other speakers deprecated violence, and uttered reiterated cautions against its employment. Before adjourning the Palace Yard meeting obtained 10,000 signatures for the National Petition, and elected delegates to the forthcoming Chartist convention.

Anxious to avoid the internal dissension which would follow open censure of O'Connor, but desirous at the same time of setting up a counter-influence to his physical force swagger, the London Working Men's Association shortly afterwards issued an address desiring "the cooperation of rich and poor, male and female, the sober, reflecting, and industrious" to carry forward the principles of moral force. But although this address was signed "on behalf of 136 Working Men's Associations" actual events showed that the influence of the London Association was waning.<sup>25</sup> As the movement got fairly under way this organization, which had laid the foundation and furnished the program, was doomed to be swallowed up by the fierce agitation to which it had unwittingly given the initiative.

Henceforth the cause of the Charter was proclaimed by advocates of two different schools, one made up of those who contended that the people's rights must be secured by moral means alone, led by William Lovett, and the other and larger, of those who declared that the ruling classes would bow to nothing short of physical force, led by Feargus O'Connor, who after wresting the movement from its original sponsors was to lead it finally to disaster and ruin. The quarrel between Lovett and O'Connor began as early as 1837.

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<sup>25</sup> Rosenblatt, F., *op. cit.*, p. 145.

It was primarily the result of sheer incompatibility of temper between the sincere, self-sacrificing, but somewhat sensitive and resentful London artisan, and the blustering, blarneying, managing, but intellectually and morally very unreliable Irishman, who probably had never done an honest day's work in his life.<sup>26</sup>

It remains true, however, that Lovett had

no first-hand knowledge of England, with its turbulent population of miners, and cotton operatives, swept together without traditional organization, in towns which were little better than mining camps. To that as yet undisciplined force, which, led by O'Connor, snatched the Chartist movement after 1839 out of the hands of London, and carried it forward on a wave of misery and violence to its ignominious collapse, Lovett, by temperament a student and teacher, made little appeal.<sup>27</sup>

In appearance, as in temperament, O'Connor was exactly fitted to become a popular idol. He was physically imposing, being burly and athletic and upwards of six feet in height. Red-headed and of fair complexion, he was typically Irish in countenance, even to his nose, which was "prominent not from its size, for it was rather small," but from its Hibernian "cocked-up conformation."<sup>28</sup> Cooper has left a lively picture of the Irish leader as he appeared in 1842.

There was much that was attractive in him when I first knew him. His fine manly form and his powerful baritone voice gave him great advantages as a popular leader. His conversation was rich in Irish humor, and often evinced a shrewd knowledge of character. The fact of his having been in the House of Commons, and \* \* \* among the upper classes, also lent him influence. I do not think half a dozen Chartists cared a fig about his boasted descent from 'Roderick O'Connor the king of Connaught, and the last king of all Ireland;' but the connection of his family with the 'United Irishmen' and patriotic sufferers of the last century, rendered him a natural representative of the cause of political liberty.<sup>29</sup>

Another reason for O'Connor's great influence was his ownership of the immensely popular weekly newspaper

<sup>26</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Introduction, *Life and Struggles of Wm. Lovett*, p. vii.

<sup>28</sup> "Grant's Sketch of O'Connor in 1838," reprinted by Cooper in the *Midland Counties Illuminator*, i; i.

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, pp. 179-180.

the *Northern Star*, which he is said to have started with eight hundred pounds borrowed from friends. In this paper he printed all his own speeches, and villified not only "Tory tyrants and Whig tricksters," but also his personal enemies within the Chartist ranks. Realizing how much the humble individual enjoys seeing his name in print, he took care to publish reports of every Chartist meeting anywhere in the kingdom, and of every individual speech, no matter how insignificant. By this means he quickly increased the power and popularity of the *Northern Star*, and raised up for the paper an army of enthusiastic agents. Although it cost 4½d. it at one time enjoyed a circulation of 60,000 copies a week.<sup>30</sup> O'Connor was, in fact, a pioneer in the field of popular journalism, and was successful because he gave the public exactly what the public wanted. That his paper was "the worst," as well as "the most successful of the Radical papers, a melancholy tribute to the low level of intelligence,"<sup>31</sup> is perhaps true, but the *Star* was no more sensational or unscrupulous, and it was certainly much less indecent, than are the yellow journals and tabloids of our own day.

With his Irish wit, bluff forthright manner of speaking and writing, imposing physical presence, and stentorian voice, which was especially effective at the huge outdoor meetings of the day, it was no wonder that O'Connor became the idol of the working classes, and that he at first held Thomas Cooper in a bondage of uncritical admiration. To such a leader

conceited even to megalomania, ambitious, energetic, to a certain degree disinterested and sincere, an agitator and a demagogue to his finger tips, the North of England presented an ideal field of operations. A great vague mass of desperate, excited, uneducated labourers was crying out for leaders in the campaign against the

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<sup>30</sup> When it was at this figure it had the largest circulation of any weekly paper of that period, and more than quadrupled the daily sales of the *Times*. West, J., *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

new oppression of the Poor Law. Their lack of programme was paralleled by O'Connor's disregard of programmes. He came forth to lead them he knew not whither, and they followed blindly." <sup>2</sup>

The first Chartist convention assembled at London in February 1839, and after two months of largely aimless debate, a number of the more moderate members resigned and went home. It was May 7th before the first Petition for the Charter was received. Said to contain 1,200,000 signatures, it was turned over to Messrs. Atwood and Fielden for presentation to the House, and the Convention then moved to Birmingham. When the Government caused the arrest of Henry Vincent and other Chartist missionaries, the Convention issued a fiery manifesto intimating that unless the working class attained freedom a revolution must follow. It published also a list of "ulterior measures" to be adopted in case Parliament rejected the Petition; measures which it would have been impossible to enforce, as the Convention's assumption that supporters of the Charter were everywhere a majority amongst the workers was a mistaken theory, as after events plainly showed.

The presence of the Chartist convention aroused Birmingham to fever heat. The poorer classes anticipated some miraculous measures of relief, while the municipal authorities, as a result of the proposed "ulterior measures" were badly scared. Out of this situation a bloody clash developed when on July 4th the new London police, brought to Birmingham by the mayor, charged a gathering of the people who had assembled at the "Bull Ring" to listen to the reading of a newspaper. Such meetings had been forbidden, but the prohibition had not previously been enforced. The ensuing struggle resulted in the wounding of ten policemen, and the arrest of a number of armed and unarmed Chartists, including two members of the Convention. An investigation subsequently conducted by Joseph Sturge found that the principal cause of the disorder was the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96. Hugh Gaitskell, of University College, London, remarked to the writer that Hovell's bias against O'Connor was so strong as to result in unfairness. It does not seem so to me. A study of O'Connor's career may some day be forthcoming.

misbehavior of the imported London police, and that the magistrates had acted very hurriedly and recklessly.

Lovett rose to the occasion magnificently. In the aroused and frightened Convention he introduced a series of resolutions denouncing the magistrates for having perpetrated "a wanton, flagrant, and unjust outrage upon the people of Birmingham." In order that others might not suffer the consequences of such a bold course, he insisted that his name alone as Secretary of the Convention be appended to the five hundred placards on which the approved resolutions were printed and posted throughout the city. As he had anticipated, he was immediately arrested, as was also John Collins, another member of the Convention, who had taken the resolutions to the printer.

After a trial before a prejudiced jury the two men were sentenced to twelve months each in the County Goal, where they suffered the harsh treatment usually accorded only to hardened felons. The food and prison conditions were so bad that Lovett, who was never robust, came out temporarily broken in health, if not in spirit. But he had "accomplished more by this sacrifice for the cause of Chartistism and the advance of democracy in England than all those who sneered at his moral philosophy \* \* \* In the history of the first Chartist Convention there is but one cheering episode, and Lovett is its hero."<sup>38</sup>

It was while Lovett was in jail that the first Chartist petition was finally brought forward in Parliament. On July 12, 1839, Attwood moved that it receive the consideration of the House acting as a committee of the whole, and unrolled enough of it [the document was declared to be three miles long] so that one end rested on the Clerk's table. Disraeli has thus described its presentation:

[The Petition] was carried down to Westminster on a triumphal car, accompanied by the delegates in solemn procession. It was necessary to construct a machine in order to introduce the large bulk of parchment, signed by a million and a half persons, into the House of Commons, and thus supported its vast form remained on the floor of the House during the discussion. The House, after a

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<sup>38</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 158.

debate which was not deemed by the people commensurate with the importance of the occasion, decided on rejecting the prayer of the petition, and from that moment the party in the Convention who advocated recourse to physical force in order to obtain their purpose was in the ascendant.<sup>4</sup>

The Bull Ring riots, which occurred in the summer of 1839, were spontaneous and unorganized outbreaks. In the Newport Rebellion, which occurred in the autumn, there blazed out for the first and last time what seems to have been a more or less organized attempt at physical force.<sup>35</sup> Because of its having been led by John Frost, one of the early Chartist organizers, the affair is often referred to as Frost's Rebellion. At the head of a group of miserably armed colliers Frost entered the little town of Newport, Monmouth County, on a Monday morning, after marching most of the night about the moors. Excited and alarmed messengers had long preceded their coming. Just how many were in the Chartist ranks it is impossible to say,<sup>36</sup> but the military garrison stationed in the Westport Hotel had plenty of time to prepare to receive them, and upon their arrival in front of the hotel the soldiers poured a continuous and deadly fire into the Chartist ranks. There was a desperate but necessarily brief struggle between

<sup>4</sup> Disraeli, B. *Sybil*, Book v, Chap. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rosenblatt declares that the stories of the events leading up to the Welsh rising are utterly conflicting. The biographer of John Frost denies the existence of any previous plan of organization. Cooper writing eighteen months after the event declared: "As for the Newport affair, every Chartist knows by this time that it was a mere *demonstration*, without the slightest intention of 'riot,' and got up under a direct pledge to the contrary by the banished Frost and his companions for the liberation of Vincent and Edwards [a hypothesis which West holds to be absurd, as Monmouth where Vincent was confined is twenty miles from Newport]; but by the pernicious admixture of spies who urged the men to drink, and so succeeded in the infernal job for which they were hired, was transformed into a massacre." [Midland Counties *Illuminator*, April 3, 1841]. This same explanation of hired spies and drink Cooper advanced later as the reason for the Pottery riots, for which he was sentenced to two years in Stafford Prison.

<sup>36</sup> West says that 200 would be a generous estimate of the number of rioters [*op. cit.*, p. 144]; Gammage states that the *Times* estimated the number at 8,000 and the *Morning Chronicle* at 1,000—he himself declares for 10,000 [*op. cit.*, p. 175]; and Hovell says there were 3,000 [*op. cit.*, p. 175].

the undisciplined workers in the open and the fully armed soldiers firing from shelter. At the end of it the Chartist leaders fled, leaving ten dead and fifty wounded on the ground. Ten of the wounded were so badly hurt that they afterwards died.<sup>37</sup> Many arrests were made and Frost, Williams, and Jones, the leaders, with eleven others, were indicted for high treason. A special commission was immediately appointed to try the case, which sentenced ten of the conspirators to banishment for life, and the leaders to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, a sentence afterwards commuted to transportation for life.<sup>38</sup>

The wholesale arrests and numerous convictions (543 between January 1, 1839, and June 30, 1840, as compared to 443 persons imprisoned for political offences between 1837 and 1840)<sup>39</sup> seemed for a time to have crushed the movement; but the causes which brought forth the agitation

<sup>37</sup> In Book V of the *Purgatory of Suicides* (1845) Cooper devoted two stanzas [xiii and xiv] to extolling the heroism of Frost, and of the youth George Shell, one of the Chartist victims of the rifles of the soldiery. In his notes upon these stanzas Cooper said: "I write from no personal knowledge of John Frost, for the 'Newport Insurrection' occurred more than a year before I became acquainted with a single Chartist, but from the testimony of my eloquent and intelligent friend Henry Vincent \* \* \*

Treason doth never prosper: what's the reason?

For, if it prosper, none dare call it treason.

So says Sir John Harrington; and, without asserting that it was morally or physically possible for the Welch *emeute* of November 1839 to have succeeded, I shall not shrink to avow my conviction that the fated enterprise of John Frost, which had for its object the enfranchisement of every male inhabitant of Great Britain and Ireland of twenty-one years of age, was equally as noble, although not so imposing as the triumph-in-arms of the Barons of Runnymede, or the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688." In the third edition of the *Purgatory of Suicides* [1853] this note was followed by the following bracketed reservation: "I let this note stand as it did in the first and second editions; but, having learnt more of the true character of the Newport affair, I may just say I have no admiration left for it." This reversal of opinion was due in part, perhaps, to Cooper's contacts with Carlyle and Kingsley following the publication of his poem. Both these great men, while professing sympathy with Chartism, strongly condemned its physical force manifestations.

<sup>38</sup> Due to the approaching marriage of Queen Victoria, and the large number of petitions received by the Government. W. J. Linton tells how Carlyle from conscientious scruples refused to sign such a petition [*Three Score and Ten Years*, N. Y., 1894, p. 145].

<sup>39</sup> Rosenblatt, F., *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206.

remaining unchanged, there could be no permanent peace, nor was there any until the abuses fought against were remedied.

Even while the first phase of the movement rested, temporarily checked, new converts were being made who were destined to revive and carry on the fight. Among them was Thomas Cooper. Until December, 1840, however, he had "never attended a Chartist meeting, or met with anyone who maintained Chartist opinions."<sup>40</sup> His activities after joining the movement must now receive our attention.

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<sup>40</sup> *Life*, p. 135.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHARTIST CONVERT

Like so many other earnest Victorians, Cooper was a born crusader. He was never able to take up any cause without immediately endeavoring to convert the rest of the world to his latest enthusiasm. Impatient of all who disagreed with him, he always sooner or later clashed with others in the same field, and went off on some tangent of his own. This inability to work with others, resulting partly from his self-education and consequent lack of opportunity to learn how to adapt himself to others of equal or superior powers, was a real defect in his character, and vitiated much of his effort in various fields of endeavor.

His connection with the *Leicestershire Mercury* was very brief, lasting only fifteen weeks. Coming to the paper in November 1840, he left it about the middle of February 1841. According to his own account the reason for his dismissal was his conversion to Chartism, though he was told he must seek a new position because the paper had not sufficient sale to afford the salary he was receiving. While still in the employ of the *Mercury* he had contributed several articles to the *Midland Counties Illuminator*, the local Chartist weekly. Though unsigned, their authorship was doubtless pretty well known, and according to Cooper this was the real reason why he was given a month's notice.

When the Chartists heard of his dismissal they sent a deputation to ask him to take over their publication, the *Illuminator*, as its editor, George Bown, whom Cooper describes as a fine intellectual old man, was anxious to give it up. They mentioned a salary of thirty shillings a week, but Cooper's old friend Joseph Foulkes<sup>1</sup> scoffed

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper first knew Winks in Gainsborough. He organized the Mutual Improvement Society to which Cooper had belonged, and was also one of the principal combatants in the "poetical war about

at the idea of their being able to keep their promise, and advised him to have nothing to do with Chartism. Nevertheless Cooper resolved to accept the offer, feeling that he could not abandon the suffering stockingers. His wages were paid in full for only one week. Although twenty-nine pounds "in shares and gifts" was paid into a press fund when Cooper took over, there was outstanding debt to the amount of eighteen pounds, and the paper continued to lose money steadily. Cooper finally proposed to the Chartist that they turn the paper over to him, he to be responsible for its debts, and this offer was accepted.<sup>2</sup> In making this proposal Cooper was influenced first by his desire to have full scope for his powers as a journalist, and secondly by his desire to help his own class in their struggle for education and political power. He immediately arranged to have the *Illuminator* printed on larger and better paper, and with better type. With his assumption of control the periodical began a new series,<sup>3</sup> the first number of which was dated February 13, 1841. The title of the publication is explained by an engraving at the head of the first page which showed an unrolled scroll labeled "The People's Charter" beneath which appeared an epitome of the Six Points. This scroll is represented as sending out rays of light in every direction, evidently for the illumination of

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the propriety of singing a hymn to Arne's grand melody of 'Rule Britannia.'" After removing to Leicester Winks became a printer and bookseller, a Baptist preacher, and editor of three or four small religious periodicals. He was a staunch anti-Corn Law League partisan, which made him unpopular with the Chartist. When Cooper abandoned free-thinking in the 1850's it was Winks who received him into the General Baptist denomination.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 147. Cf. "The little paper would have stopped because they could no longer raise funds to carry it on, but they gave it into my hands entirely, and I begged and borrowed money to carry it on." Gammage, R. G. *op. cit.*, p. 444. In the *Leicestershire Mercury* of Feb. 19, 1842, Cooper acknowledged a loan of £10 for the support of the *Illuminator* (in the *Life* this has grown to £20), and various other small sums received from different sources for the same purpose.

<sup>3</sup> The British Museum file of the *Midland Counties Illuminator* includes only this new series.

the Midland Counties and any other parts of England within the radius of its beams. The paper itself consisted of four pages, folio size, and was issued weekly at a price of three half-pence a copy.<sup>4</sup> Cooper opened a combined circulation office and newspaper room on High Street where copies of the *Northern Star* and other Chartist publications were also offered for sale. The *Illuminator* was the first of seven papers which he was to conduct, every one of which was a financial failure.

But editorial writing was only one of his weapons in the fight for the Charter. At Leicester he resumed the preaching activities which he had dropped so abruptly at Lincoln. Parenthetically it may be noted that in point of fact he remained a preacher all his life, merely introducing into his sermons at different times various heterodox doctrines, from Chartism to Free Thought, and returning to orthodoxy in his old age. Like his friend Charles Kingsley he was ever animated by a passionate desire to make social justice prevail, and like Kingsley again he was firmly convinced of the relevancy of Christianity to the making of a new social order.

In the autobiography Cooper states that he held his first preaching service the Sunday after the Chartists had asked him to conduct the *Illuminator*, but the first notice of such a meeting does not appear until April 3, some eight weeks after that event.<sup>5</sup> These Sunday meetings, held at six o'clock in the evening, included the singing of hymns, many with special Chartist words, and opened and closed with prayer. Cooper generally spoke about an hour, partly on a religious theme, and partly on the sufferings and

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<sup>4</sup> The publisher was first announced as John Seal, Bookseller, Townhall Lane, Leicester. At the time of the controversy between Markham and Cooper the following year Seal took sides against Cooper. His name continued to appear as publisher until May 22, 1841, when Cooper's appeared in its place.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Northern Star*, April 3, 1841, and *Midland Counties Illuminator* of same date. It is of course possible that there may have been unadvertised meetings before this date.

wrongs of his hearers and how they could be cured by the adoption of the Charter.<sup>6</sup>

In the latter part of April, though he had been a Chartist for only a few months, Cooper was elected Secretary of the local Chartist Association. The ensuing announcements in the *Northern Star* of projected lectures and of the organization of a reading-room, library, and discussion and musical sections are an indication of the enlivening influence he was able to exert. The High street news-room became, too, a rendezvous for working men, and Cooper increased the circulation of the *Illuminator* by employing out-of-work Chartists to sell copies in the surrounding villages.

He also made himself a factor in local politics by editorially advising Chartists to support the Tories in the bye-election of this year. Bitter hatred of the new Poor Law brought forth this paradoxical advice, which was assailed by Francis Place and strongly censured by G. J. Holyoake. But the anti-Poor Law feeling which was at the bottom of a good deal of Chartism induced many Chartists in all parts of England to go with the Tories. "Let us end the power of the Whigs—vote for the Tories in preference to \* \* \* the authors of the accursed Poor Law,"<sup>7</sup> became the general cry. When the Tories of Nottingham, after the death of Sir Ronald Ferguson, nominated the proprietor of the London *Times*, Mr. John Walter, who was well known as a determined foe of the Poor Law, Cooper urged his readers to rally to Walter's standard. He was not alone in his support, as Bairstow, Pitkeithley, Markham, and Vincent, all Chartist leaders of reputation, also helped Walter in this election. Colonel Thompson, although as an Anti-Corn Law man he hated the Tories, advocated their support at this time in preference to the Whigs, and Feargus O'Connor came out in support of the same policy. Among the Chartist chieftains only O'Brien opposed it.

<sup>6</sup> These meetings were continued throughout the spring and summer, at first in All Saints Open, and then, as they grew larger and the weather grew warmer, 'out of doors in the market place.

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, p. 148.

Cooper's fanatical devotion to O'Connor at this period is evident in almost every number of the *Illuminator*. In May of the previous year the proprietor of the *Northern Star* had been convicted of newspaper libel, and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in York Castle, from which he was allowed, however, to continue writing for the *Star*. O'Connor's jealousy of other leaders, one of the causes of the break-up of Chartism, manifested itself this year in his emphatic denunciation from his prison cell of Knowledge Chartism [Lovett's program of propaganda], Tee-total Chartism [Vincent's temperance crusade], and Christian Chartism [the earnest effort of Arthur O'Neill and others in England and Scotland to establish Christian Chartist Churches]. Cooper's editorial supporting his chief and expressing his fears of the effects of disunion said:

Feargus O'Connor cannot fail to produce a strong impression on the mind of every genuine Chartist by every line he pens. Chartists know that there is no mistake about him; all the dodge and trickery, and subtle insinuation of Whig hirelings and sham Radicals cannot draw the people into disaffection toward their energetic and incorruptible champion. This is not the language of "personal idolotry;" it is simply a candid confession of proper and deserved attachment on the part of workingmen to their best human friend. "We speak advisedly" \* \* \* when we say their best human friend. Workingmen feel an ardent devotion to the names of Vincent, and Lovett, and Collins, and O'Brien \* \* \* and McDouall \* \* \* and a host of others that might be mentioned; but while they know how to appreciate the \* \* \* true patriotic qualities which distinguish severally the individuals in the front phalanx of their army, in *no one name* do they discern a *combination of qualities* so commanding in their influence, so magnetic in attracting an unwavering attachment as in their brave O'Connor \* \* \*

We do not, after much reflection, think that his jealous dread of disunion being produced by Church Chartism, Teetotal Chartism, etc. results merely from a spirit of querulousness in the mind of Feargus, or is the effect of incarceration and unacquaintance with the actual state of Chartism. We fear events *may* prove that O'Connor on this, as on various other subjects, is possessed of greater political foresight than all the other leaders of Chartism put together.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Midland Counties Illuminator*, April 18, 1842. The italics, a method of emphasis for which Cooper had a weakness, are in the original.

The following month he wrote in a similar strain of adulation regarding the "caged lion" at whose name "political jugglers turn pale, and temporizers feel a creeping of the skin."<sup>9</sup>

Despite his endorsement of O'Connor's opposition to Temperance Chartist, Cooper worked with Vincent during the latter's visit to Leicester in March. Cooper himself had become a teetotaler shortly after his arrival in Leicester, and kept the pledge until his illness after two years in Stafford Prison, when, in accordance with medical advice, he gave it up. During the months preceding Vincent's appearance in Leicester Cooper himself had preached temperance enthusiastically, devising the pledge "I hereby promise to abstain, etc. until the People's Charter becomes the law of the land," and administering it to more than a hundred Chartists.

In an editorial begun in the first number of the *Midland Counties Illuminator*, and continued through several subsequent issues, Cooper dealt with the topic "The Education of the People," a subject in which he manifested a life-long interest. In another editorial he divided the middle class into four divisions according to their interests and prosperity, and urged the fourth or beggared class to make common cause with the operatives. Nevertheless in an editorial headed "Union of the Middle Classes with Working Men—Is It Probable?", inspired by Miall's articles in the *Nonconformist* on "Reconciliation of the Middle and Lower Classes,"<sup>10</sup> he answered the question of his title in the negative.

Certain features of the *Illuminator* are to be found in most of Cooper's later publications. Among them is the printing of open letters upon subjects and personalities in the public eye, in this instance the contributions of Colonel [afterwards Major-General] Peronnet Thompson, a Chartist sympathizer and Radical M. P. Another is the practice of printing each week a selection of extracts from literature and philosophy, most of them culled from the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* May 8, 1841.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Miall, Arthur, *Life of Edward Miall*, London, 1884, p. 75.

editor's own reading. As in most other papers of the time there was usually a poetry corner, in which there appeared, besides the effusions of local rhymsters, selections from Byron, Moore, Shelley, and Ebenezer Elliott, although Cooper seldom published any of his own verse in this department. In the *Illuminator* there were also occasional book-reviews, as well as three biographical sketches of heroes of the Commonwealth, the work of the editor. The first number contained, too, the initial installment of a biblical parody, entitled "Mesopotamia Ms" which dealt with Chartism and Leicester affairs.<sup>11</sup> Cooper's editorials, particularly in the latter numbers of the *Illuminator*, were violent in their denunciation of the Whigs to the point of scurrility, but it may be said in extenuation that the tone of the press everywhere was not much better. Moreover, Cooper had the sufferings of the framework knitters constantly before his eyes, and the ruling class seemed to him brutally indifferent to the misery and degradation into which the workers were every year sinking deeper and deeper. It must be remembered, too, that the Chartists, and none more than Cooper, were convinced that the electoral reforms which they demanded would effect an instantaneous improvement in the worker's miserable lot.

Under the circumstances, it is hard to see how the *Illuminator* could have been other than what it was,—a hard-hitting and partisan political weekly representing the hopes and fears and convictions of a class raging against the double bondage of political impotence and economic slavery. Cooper and his early Chartist weeklies did their part in protesting against conditions which called forth also the flaming protests of Kingsley, the fierce rhymes of Elliott, and the savage denunciations of Carlyle; though none of these men, any more than the obscure Leicester editor, seemed able to arouse the sleeping consciences of their contemporaries in any effective number.

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<sup>11</sup> The "Mesopotamia Ms" was undoubtedly inspired by the notorious "Chaldee Ms" the joint production of Lockhart, Christopher North, and Hogg, published in the first number of what became afterwards Blackwood's Magazine.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1841

It was apparent as early as March that an early dissolution of Parliament and consequent general election were imminent, and in the *Illuminator* of the 27th of that month Cooper had a long editorial on the "Approaching Parliamentary Election," based upon a communication to the editor from J. R. Richardson, a well-known Chartist. Mr. Richardson gave it as his opinion that the middle class was beginning to have more respect for Chartists and their opinions. "They will now talk to us," he asserted in one unfortunate sentence. "They will now talk to us," Cooper repeated.

Really this reminds one forcibly of the lad in London who ran agape to his mother and told her that the Prince Regent had spoken to him. 'Spoken to you, sirrah! I dare say he would speak to a dirty urchin like you,' exclaimed the woman. 'But he did, indeed, mother,' asserted the lad very earnestly, 'for he said to me, "Get out of the way, you ragged rascal, or I'll ride over you."'

"That," the paragraph concludes, "is something like the 'talk' which the middle classes in Leicester and Nottingham vouchsafe towards Chartists." Cooper concluded, therefore that it was necessary for the Chartists to bring their own avowed candidates into the field.

At the beginning of May this was done, the Universal Suffrage candidates being announced as Feargus O'Connor [who was, however, still in jail] and Colonel Peronnet Thompson. Cooper made a special trip to Blackheath to invite the Colonel to run, and announced his favorable response at a meeting of the Chartists held on May 9th. A subsequent meeting recommended petitioning the House of Commons for the release of O'Connor so that he might address the electors. Cooper predicted that "If the untameable Feargus were returned, he would not let one day

pass without pronouncing the magic words 'Universal Suffrage' in thrilling and energetic accents within those walls where hypocrisy and shuffling have so long occupied the so-called representatives of the people."<sup>1</sup>

A committee composed of Markham, Seal, Anderson, Windley, and Cooper was delegated to consult with the Whig Mayor, William Biggs, who was also chairman of the Reform Society, regarding the possibility of a coalition of the Chartists and "liberals" during the coming election, each faction to name one of the Parliamentary candidates. The proposal was submitted chiefly, as Cooper admitted later, "to take from the deceitful Whigs all occasion of further cant and pretence about inconsistent union with the Tories." Biggs replied by letter that under the rules of the Reform Society it would be necessary to call together all its members for the consideration of such a proposition, that he personally had no power to enter upon such negotiations, and since there was no assurance of any immediate dissolution of Parliament he must decline to call a meeting until there was. Such Chartists as were electors, he concluded, might attend, "and make any overtures or move any resolutions that may approve themselves to their judgment." "In other words," Cooper observed sarcastically, "the Chartists are at liberty to attend and be laughed at." Two weeks later in still another savage attack upon the Whigs he again admonished Chartist electors, "It is your DUTY to vote for Tories in preference to Whigs at the coming election."<sup>2</sup>

But this was the death-cry of the *Illuminator*. The Whigs, who were the dominant party in Leicester, decided that Cooper had gone on long enough. Unfortunately for him his printer, Albert Cockshaw, was also printer to the Corporation. Although he had published all the numbers of the *Illuminator* until now,<sup>3</sup> after printing the issue of May 29th Cockshaw announced that he could print no

<sup>1</sup> *Midland Counties Illuminator*, May 15, 1841.

<sup>2</sup> *Midland Counties Illuminator*, May 15, 1841.

<sup>3</sup> Sixteen numbers, beginning February 18 and ending May 29, 1843.

more. He refused to give any explanation for this decision, saying that he was not at liberty to tell his reasons. Cooper acknowledged being a few pounds in debt to him, but added, "I did not believe—nor did he say—that this was his reason for discontinuing the printing of my paper."<sup>4</sup> When other printers of the town were approached, "none of Liberal politics dared undertake the business; and none of Conservative politics had the convenience of materials."<sup>5</sup> The only available printer who was not afraid of the Corporation or some of the local dignitaries was Thomas Warwick, "an honest, lowly man, though he voted for the Tories," but his type faces were limited in quantity and mean in quality, so that it was not possible for him to produce such a handsome sheet as the *Illuminator* had been, and its publication was accordingly suspended.

Not only was his Chartist weekly thus suppressed, but Cooper himself was served with a notice that he must quit the rooms which he had rented for a publishing office. The Whigs were determined to drive the troublesome newcomer from town. But Cooper was a hard man to drive. By this time, too, he had been bitten by political ambition, as the following statement shows:

I here tell the middle class of all politics—to their teeth—that I will not be driven from Leicester. If I am permitted to have fair play I will pay every man what I owe him, but if combined and plotting attempts are made to ruin my shop, and I am finally shut out of it, I will sell lucifer matches in the street, or get my bread in any *honest* way that I can, but I will not leave my native town. No, never, until I am returned M. P. for the borough—unless my Maker summons me \* \* \* before I have a chance of a contest.<sup>6</sup>

Within a few days after the stoppage of the *Illuminator* he was again in the field with the *Chartist Rushlight*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> *Northern Star*, June 5, 1841.

<sup>6</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, February 19, 1842.

<sup>7</sup> No copies of this or of the succeeding *Extinguisher* and *Commonwealthsman* have been found, in spite of diligent search by the Librarians of the City of Leicester Public Libraries and of the National Central Library, London. The former was kind enough

This periodical, however, could not compare in appearance with the excellently printed *Illuminator*, and although Cooper declares that the demand for the first numbers of the *Rushlight* was so large that they were sold as fast as the printer could throw them off, the plain truth of the matter was that he had received a severe check. But the terrible months of want and suffering which followed, particularly at the beginning of 1842 when the hosiery trade in Leicester came to a total standstill, would certainly have wiped out the *Illuminator* as inevitably as it did the *Rushlight*, *Extinguisher*, and *Commonwealthsman* which succeeded it.

After the stoppage of the *Illuminator*, which, except for the Colonel Thompson letters and the correspondence, poetry, and "Note-book" columns, was written by the editor without assistance, it was deemed desirable that the Chartists should purchase and set up their own press, and an appeal was made for public subscriptions. Cooper received about three pounds at his shop from "various middle-class men," and Messrs. Swain and Bowman, the treasurers of the fund, collected from seven to eight pounds, largely by means of subscription lists in public houses and elsewhere headed:

"The *Midland Counties Illuminator* having been extinguished by "the friends of free discussion," the liberty-loving Whigs, it is proposed to assist Mr. Cooper, the Editor, to purchase types and a press of his own. The host will kindly receive any sums contributed."<sup>6</sup>

This plan for an independent press had finally to be abandoned, however, owing to lack of sufficient support.

The Chartist *Rushlight* was a mere stop-gap. Duncombe's son remarked that it would appear to have been

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to inquire in Birmingham as well as Leicester, and the London institution advised me that they had inquired for these three publications (without success) at the British Museum, the Guildhall, the University of London Libraries, the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and "practically all the university libraries in Great Britain." To Mr. L. Newcombe, Librarian of the National Central, and to Dr. E. E. Lowe, Director of the Leicester libraries, my warmest thanks are due for their painstaking efforts to trace these periodicals, which seem to have completely disappeared.

<sup>6</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, March 5, 1842.

lit at both ends, it so soon burned itself out.<sup>9</sup> It subsided with the election excitement that had given it birth, but with the aid of the press fund which had been collected the more ambitious *Extinguisher* was established. This sold at first for three half-pence, and continued for twenty-two numbers before, owing to the hard times of 1842, it too failed.<sup>10</sup>

But to return to the subject of our chapter, one of the principal reasons for the bitter opposition of the Chartists to the Whigs and their anti-Corn Law agitation in this general election, an opposition which is apt to appear to a later generation as irrational, is to be found in the following resolution passed at a meeting of the employees of John Bright:

That it is the opinion of this meeting that though the Corn Law is an injurious tax, yet the present House of Commons, or any other \* \* \* constituted on the present suffrage, will never repeal that law so as to be beneficial to the working classes, and this meeting is of the opinion that the present Corn Law agitation is made up for the purpose of diverting the minds of the people from the only remedy of all political grievances \* \* \* possession of their political rights.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Life and Correspondence of Thomas S. Duncombe, late M. P. for Finsbury*, edited by his son Thomas H. Duncombe [two vols.], London, 1868. This source also states that Mr. Duncombe sent "a handsome contribution" to the *Extinguisher* "which only extinguished itself;" and also, later, to the *Commonwealthsman*, "which never became common enough, and possessed not the most remote pretensions to wealth." i; 302-304.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper stated that "the first number was a loss of 10 s.; the second a loss of £1; and each successive number up to the twenty-second, the price being sunk to one half-penny, was a loss of from 7s. or 8s. to 9s. or 10s." The charge by Markham and Bowman that he had attempted to solicit from the Tories a weekly allowance for the support of the paper, Cooper denounced as "a base lie, villainous and unmitigated." Further, he stated that he "did not receive a farthing from O'Connor then or ever" for any of his papers, though before Cooper was in charge Feargus had sent Markham £7 to help start the *Illuminator* [Vide *Leicestershire Mercury*, March 5, 1842]. The *Extinguisher* took its name from the following circumstance. During the election excitement a local worthy named Samuel Deacon made a large tin extinguisher, and approaching the unsuspecting Cooper as he stood in the center of the hustings as Universal Suffrage candidate, suddenly clapped it over his head, while the Whigs cried out, "There, he has extinguished the *Rush-light*." [Life, p. 155].

<sup>11</sup> Trevelyan, G. M., *Life of John Bright*, p. 31.

Linton declares that in the radical borough of Finsbury the Corn Law League dared not call a public meeting, "Not that an opposing hand would have been raised in favor of the bread-tax, but that, as from one voice, they would have heard the rebuke of their more selfish policy—'Give us our place of manhood, and that, with other injustices, shall cease; but manhood even before bread.'"<sup>12</sup>

Cooper drove home the same lesson in the *Illuminator*.

Operatives should parry every thrust of their opponents with that argument which even the least subtle among them find unanswerable at all times by any foe, however cunning \* \* \*. "Give us THE SUFFRAGE, and we *will* help you to abolish the Starvation Laws, and all other bad laws;—but since you deny us the means of helping you, help yourselves!"<sup>13</sup>

Kingsley voiced the fear that free trade meant lower wages and greater power for the manufacturers as late as 1852.<sup>14</sup> But Bright's biographer says emphatically that "neither Cobden, Bright, nor any of the Leaguers looked on the abolition of the Corn Laws as a means of enabling them to pay lower wages, as some of the manufacturers had done in 1815. The Leaguers said, and said truly, as the event showed, that Free Trade would raise wages."<sup>15</sup> The same writer says further that "Cobden had no notion of quarreling with the working men. When in the autumn of 1838 a friend wrote despairingly of the vagaries of Radicalism and the violence of Chartism, he had replied that he preferred to see ill-directed violence rather than acquiescence in evils that had been borne too long."<sup>16</sup>

In Leicester the opposition to the Whigs and the Anti-Corn Law League which the Chartist regarded as synonymous found expression a few days after the suppression of the *Illuminator*, and the day following Cooper's eviction from his newspaper office, in an attack on the Corn Law Repeal meeting of June 1, 1841, to which the city's Par-

<sup>12</sup> Linton, W. J., *Life of Watson*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Midland Counties Illuminator*, May 29, 1841.

<sup>14</sup> Hughes, Thomas, *Prefatory Memoir to Alton Locke*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>15</sup> Trevelyan, G. M., *Life of John Bright*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

liamentary representatives, Ellis and Easthope, who were candidates for re-election, had been invited.

Markham and Swain, with the assistance, Cooper intimated, of the Tories were the principals in this affair. Markham arrived in Leicester a few hours before the meeting with the two Chartist speakers John Collins and Dean Taylor. They were met by the Wigston band, hired by John Swain, Cooper's landlord,<sup>17</sup> and a procession was organized by sending the musicians through the populous parts of the town. Chartist banners, and a placard denouncing the Poor Law Commissioner were displayed, and the procession arrived in front of the Exchange a few minutes before the time set for the Whig meeting. "Then," writes the correspondent of the *Northern Star*, "a dozen of our stoutest fellows rushed forward, seized the wagons which had been slyly placed at hand, and dragged them close to the hustings. \* \* \* The wheels were locked, planks placed across, banners and emblems raised, and amid the rending shouts of the multitude our champions were placed on their own platform." Such was the condition of affairs when the Mayor appeared to take the chair. When a Unitarian minister arose and offered a resolution against continuing the duties on wheat, Cooper immediately objected, and proposed an amendment denouncing the Whigs, which was seconded by Markham. The Mayor allowed the minister to reply to Cooper, but refused to permit any remarks by the latter in support of his amendment, and after a show of hands, which the *Star* affirmed was two to one in favor of Cooper, he declared the original motion carried, "and tore up the amendment with ostentatious savageness." After this "scoundrelly proceeding" the Chartists became so obstreperous that when a second resolution was proposed "both the mover and the seconder were compelled to do their business in dumb show, for

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<sup>17</sup> "When I told a certain [Tory] gentleman that Swain was out of pocket since he had expended more than the five pounds given him wherewith to hire the Wigston band for the Anti-Corn Law meeting that gentleman exclaimed, 'Five pounds! Why I gave him ten!'" Cooper's letter, *Morning Chronicle* [London], February 23, 1842.

not a syllable could be heard." Silence was obtained, however, for Cooper's re-proposal of his amendment, and for John Collins' speech of half an hour seconding it. But again the Mayor declared in favor of the Leaguers. Both sides were now aroused. "A Quaker tyrant manufacturer" proceeded to put a third resolution against Corn-law monopoly, and Cooper for a third time proposed his amendment, seconded this time by Dean Taylor in a speech which lasted for an hour and a half. At its conclusion the Mayor once more declared the original motion carried, whereupon Cooper "denounced his worship as an official false to his trust, partial in his decisions, and unworthy of the honour to which he had been elevated." The Whig Parliamentary candidates, Ellis and Easthope, and a young barrister named Mellor endeavored to address the meeting, but were heard by few. The Mayor spoke last, and delivered a violent denunciation of Chartist leaders and Chartist methods. At six o'clock, worn out by the unremitting opposition, the Whigs quitted their platform. Cooper called to the crowd to stand fast, and proposed that Mr. Swain take the chair. This being done, he put forward his previous amendment as a resolution, and it was carried "amidst enthusiastic acclamation." An address to Queen Victoria, "praying her to dismiss her present evil advisers" was then proposed and carried with only two dissenting votes. After further addresses by Chartist speakers Cooper announced his commencement of the *Rushlight*.<sup>18</sup>

The arbitrary and unfair means used to suppress his *Illuminator* were largely responsible for Cooper's acts on the present occasion, and for his active cooperation with the Tories at this time. For an account of the meeting which he wrote out and sent to Mr. Walter of the *Times*, Cooper in due time received five pounds "through a conservative gentleman in Leicester." "The payment," he admitted, "was handsome, but it is a fact well-known to all acquainted with the London press that contributions to the

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<sup>18</sup> *Northern Star*, June 5, 1841. The quotations throughout the paragraph are all from this source.

*Times*, if acceptable, are always repaid handsomely." In his letter replying to Markham's attack the following year he said that *after* the meeting a Conservative gentleman had invited him to his house and there

of his own accord he hinted at the subject of remuneration. My instant reply was, "I want nothing for myself, for I am sufficiently recompensed by our triumph over the Whigs \* \* \* but I do wish that the workingmen, many of whom have lost time today, may have something to repay them for their loss." "They shall have it," was the unhesitating reply; "make out a list of their names, and they shall have half a crown each." I did so, and received £2 10 s., every farthing of which I paid to the workingmen for the services they rendered on that day."<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after this event Cooper was added to those who handled Tory bribes directly, for during the election of 1841 such bribes were freely handed out to the Chartists by the foes of Corn Law Repeal. The subsequent disagreement between Markham and Cooper developed largely out of the election activities of the two at this time. During the following year each leader, as well as several of his partisans, published charges and counter-charges in the *Leicestershire Mercury*, which printed the correspondence under the standing heading "The Chartist Division." From the self-justifying communications of the various individuals involved it is possible to obtain a fairly accurate knowledge of what actually took place.

One of these transactions Cooper described in his autobiography. John Swain having offered to put him in touch with an influential member of the Tory party<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, February 23, 1842. This paper accused the Tories of "employing arguments on evidence of corruption which started with themselves as proof of the desirability of withholding suffrage from the masses." The *Evening Sun* of the same date also commented on Cooper's disclosures, declaring that "they reflect far more disgrace on the wealthy and unscrupulous Tories who offered the bribe than on the poor working men whose necessities tempted them to accept it."

<sup>20</sup> Cooper's principal it was directly charged in the *Leicester Chronicle* of February 26, 1842, was Mr. Philipps, of the firm of Clark, Mitchell, Philipps, and Smith, bankers in Leicester. The *Chronicle* observed, "It may be said that Cooper does not name any one \* \* \* but if Cooper does not, Markham does, and Bowman makes an allusion that cannot be misinterpreted to the 'large house in

Cooper replied that he could not advise any of the Chartist s to support the Tories in the general election. Swain retorted, "The Chartist s have not twenty votes among them, and no one is going to ask you to get Chartist s to vote for a Tory."<sup>21</sup> On this understanding Cooper was introduced to the political agent, who merely asked him to get the Chartist s to hold up their hands for the Tory candidate on election day. It was customary for all men, franchised and unfranchised alike, to take their stand at the nomination before the hustings of the party which they wished to support, and the party which had the largest number of such supporters was thereupon credited with one vote. While unimportant so far as the poll was concerned this demonstration of the popular will was often influential in helping wavering or timid voters to a decision. Cooper speciously argued that there was nothing wrong in employing Chartist s to take their stand on the Tory side [which most of them would do without needing to be asked] since even if the Tories did obtain the show of hands that would not determine the election, and the Tory silver would enable many a starving workman to hang on a little longer. The account in the autobiography concludes: "Three small linen bags were given to me on the nomination morning, each containing ten pounds in silver; and I paid every coin to the poor ragged men, and wished I had ten times as much to give them."<sup>22</sup> The contemporary record shows that there were but two linen bags containing ten pounds each, which were given with the instructions, "Use this in the best way you can for getting us some help today." After paying away the two bags in sums of five shillings each, there being still many volunteers, Cooper took down their names and promised to obtain payment for them if he could. They then all went "in a body to the hustings," first parading

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Gallowtree gate.' The *Morning Chronicle* repeated the charge on August 17, 1842, and added that Mr. Philipps was "a leading Tory, and confidential friend of the Duke of Rutland."

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 153.

the town with the Wigston band.<sup>23</sup> The Tory candidate did not appear, and when Cooper inquired about the men whose names he had taken down he was told they would be paid, although, since the candidate had declined, the money would have to be made up among the gentry of Leicester. This was done, and Cooper then paid half a crown to each man on his list.

Colonel Thompson and Feargus O'Connor having withdrawn, Cooper himself was nominated as the Universal Suffrage candidate for Parliament. Markham proposed his name [“in a joke” he said afterwards] and when it became clear that there would be no Tory candidate Cooper was nominated by two Chartist freemen to spite the Whigs. Markham was jealous of Cooper’s rapid advancement, and was doubtless sorry to see him named for Parliament, empty as the distinction was. He refused to support Cooper’s candidacy, thereby widening still further the breach between the two men.

The day before the *county* nomination, Cooper learned that the Whigs were being urged to turn out in force, “for success depended upon the show of hands.” Cooper communicated this information to the Tories immediately, and was empowered to obtain three hundred men to act with the Tory supporters in front of their hustings. On the day of the nomination he received fifty pounds “in separable sums \* \* \* and paid 330 men [only part of whom were Chartists] three shillings each.”<sup>24</sup> He also paid the members of the Wigston band for their services, though he refused their demand for seven shillings each which they said Swain had promised them. His statement concluded: “From all payments I made, not reserving one farthing for myself, I turned back 2s. 6d. from the fifty pounds to the Conservatives.”<sup>25</sup> Yet Cooper himself was at this time Universal Suffrage candidate for Parliament! He admits that he made only a poor showing at Loughborough when he was put in nomination with Bairstow

<sup>23</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, February 23, 1842.

<sup>24</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, February 23, 1842.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

for the Northern division of the county, but declares that he obtained the show of hands at the nomination for the Southern division, although the Sheriff unfairly declared in favor of the Tories.<sup>26</sup>

Another incident which must have enraged the Whigs occurred at the earlier borough nomination in Leicester. Cooper's hustings were in the center, with the Tories on his right and the Whigs on his left. Again he claims that it was he who obtained the show of hands, although the Mayor declared in favor of the Whigs. The Chartist had their small revenge, however. One of their standard-bearers drooped his cheap calico flag provokingly close to the shouting Whigs. Some of them instantly seized it and tore it to shreds. This, of course, was sufficient excuse for the rough workmen to seize as many of the Whig silk emblems as they could reach with the result that some seventy pounds' worth of Easthope's orange-and-green silk pennants quickly strewed the ground.<sup>27</sup>

In one of the interesting volumes of reminiscences which Holyoake set down in his old age occurs the following passage:

When Thomas Cooper came to London, he went, as most Chartists of note did, to see Francis Place. After some conversation Place asked, "Why did you take money to prevent Liberal meetings being held?" Cooper vehemently denied it. Place then showed him a cheque which Sir John Easthope the banker had cashed for him. Place said, "You had £109; so much in gold, so much in silver, and so much in copper, for the convenience of paying minor patriots." Years after, Cooper in his *Life* expressed regret that he had denied receiving Tory money.<sup>28</sup>

The reliability of this account is open to grave question. With regard to Cooper's denying that he had received Tory money, we have seen that he admitted it at

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, p. 156.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 155. The *Annual Register* [1892] records that "at the General Election of 1841 [Cooper] was nominated for both the town and county of Leicester, but did not in either case go to the poll." p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Holyoake, G. J., *Bygones Worth Remembering*, London, 1905 [two vols.] 1; x. These recollections were published thirteen years after Cooper's death.

the time, and repeated the admission in the autobiography, but he nowhere expresses regret for having done so. That Cooper should have gone to Sir John Easthope, Whig candidate for Parliament, to cash a Tory check seems improbable on the face of it. That Place showed Holyoake Tory checks made out to Chartists is not impossible, but that any of them was made out to Cooper, or that Cooper ever denied to Place that he had received Tory funds, seems incredible in view of the published correspondence of 1842.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It should be added, perhaps, that Holyoake himself defended the Chartists both early and late against the charge of venality. As early as 1849 he wrote, "If the Chartists ever took bribes, they took them on the side of their conscience. If a man takes a bribe to contradict his own convictions, he is venal and a traitor to the truth; but if he takes it only to give more energetic expression to his opinions, he may be considered as a victim of a pernicious philosophy, which lays his integrity under suspicion, but can hardly be called criminal." *Reasoner*, vol. x, No. 225.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SHAKESPEREAN CHARTIST ASSOCIATION

Didactic lectures, the forerunner of the Chautauqua, were as popular in England in the middle of the nineteenth century as they afterwards became in America. Cooper, who was to rise to considerable renown in this field, began such lecturing as early as August 16, 1841, when he spoke at Chartist headquarters on the subject of "Geology and the Advantages of a Knowledge of Science to Working Men." The pathetic eagerness of the workers for instruction is indicated by the following account of Cooper's initial effort in this field.

Chartists having been so often twitted with the neglect of education, Mr. Cooper gave notice that he would commence a series of familiar lectures on Science, and made respectful application to the Mayor for the use of the Guildhall. His Whig worship, however, had not yet digested his mortification at Chartist electioneering movements, and refused to grant the Hall, but without condescending to give any reason for his refusal.

The room at All Saints Open was therefore resorted to last Monday evening; and while scores were compelled to go away, the crowd of working men that remained and wedged the room, sat or stood to hear a lecture on Geology from the lips of one of their own order who has devoted his nights and days to self-cultivation. The audience remained for well-nigh two hours, an assembly of working men and women, old and young—their attention never drooping to the last, although they had passed the day at labour—and their firm fixed look testified that, notwithstanding the malicious taunts of their enemies, they have minds of their own, and can comprehend subjects which involve even the weightiest thoughts. The pleasure experienced from the delivery of this introductory lecture has led to the framing of another requisition, which after it has been signed as numerously as possible, it is intended again to present to the Mayor for the use of the Guildhall.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Northern Star*, August 21, 1841. Hovell includes Cooper among the Chartist leaders whom O'Connor turned into paid reporters. Unless it was a belief that the weekly "Chartist Intelligence" from Leicester [of which the above is a specimen] was written by Cooper

After the loss of his shop in High Street Cooper moved to 11 Church-gate, where he had several rooms of considerable size, two of which were set apart as coffee-rooms. During the final months of 1841 he "had a really good bration of O'Connor's release from prison centered here. of the town until some weeks after Christmas."<sup>2</sup> Meetings of the Chartist Association were held in his coffee-rooms, and on Saturday evenings they were crowded. The celebration of O'Connor's release from prison centered here. After the public meeting at one o'clock on August 30th, at which the two thousand working men present were addressed by Smart, Bowman, Markham, and Cooper, there was a celebration at Cooper's house.

One hundred and seventy sat down at five o'clock to tea; dancing commenced in one room as soon as the tables were removed, speaking in another, and singing in another; and between dusk and one in the morning from four to five hundred persons crowded the rooms, all eager to testify their sympathy with Chartist joy. \* \* \* The crowd outside the house at dusk amounted to more than three thousand, and Messrs. Cooper and Markham were compelled to get upon the leads of the shop-windows to address them.<sup>3</sup>

Cooper's political preaching proved so popular that he began to be called upon by Chartists outside of Leicester.<sup>4</sup> On Sunday, September 5th he preached in the market place, and the following day delivered a second address on Geology at the town hall, the petition for its use having been granted by the mayor. On September 12th a Chart-

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I do not know upon what he could have based the assertion. It is directly contradicted by Cooper's categorical statement to R. K. Philp [Northern Star, December 24, 1842]. "I have never received or asked one farthing for correspondence to the *Star*, nor ever thought of doing so" in reply to Philp's charge that he was a paid contributor. Both the inferior style of writing and the nature of the reports disprove Cooper's responsibility for the Leicester weekly reports.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> *Northern Star*, September 4, 1841.

<sup>4</sup> On August 22, 1841, Cooper preached at a meeting in Nottingham Forest. Concerning this spot he wrote in his autobiography: "Now and then I preached Chartist sermons in Nottingham Forest, where at that time there was a natural pulpit of rock; but it was seldom that I had meetings there, though I liked the place, the open air, and the people, who were proud of their unenclosed "Forest"—unenclosed now no longer, but thickly built upon. *Life*, pp. 174-175.

ist camp meeting was held on the Recreational Grounds. As the day was fine a large crowd attended. "Each speaker was listened to with absorbed attention, and produced hearty conviction that the whole truth of Christianity, and its applicableness as a system of relief for man's political as well as moral condition is now only beginning to be understood."<sup>5</sup> On Sunday, September 19, the audience for Cooper's preaching service in the market-place numbered three thousand. When the weather during the first two Sundays in October prevented holding an outdoor meeting as many people as the room would hold squeezed into the large room at All Saints Open to hear Cooper preach. During this month his Guildhall lecture was on astronomy, followed on October 31st by one on "The Democratic Poetry of Shelley," given by his assistant, Bairstow. Late in November the Mayor granted the use of the Guildhall on Monday nights during the winter "for the delivery of lectures on Science, History, and General Literature, to Mr. Cooper and such other persons as may be willing to assist him."<sup>6</sup>

Vincent returned to Leicester during November and delivered two addresses, Cooper acting as chairman of the second meeting. In his opening remarks Cooper defended the Chartist support of the Tories at Nottingham and Leicester. That he was really uneasy about the alliance, however, is shown by the fact that although he began by declaring the coalition to have been an act of statesmanship, he followed this up by admitting that "they were forced to it by the conduct of the Whigs; it was a step which was exceedingly repugnant to him \* \* \* and he sincerely hoped the Whigs would never force them to the same measure again. If the middle classes would come out for the Chartists, the Chartists would come out for the middle classes, who, he hoped, would forget all that had passed."<sup>7</sup> In his speech Vincent also pleaded for reconciliation. He felt, he said, that the workers ought to

<sup>5</sup> *Northern Star*, September 18, 1841.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, November 27, 1841.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

accept the aid of any and all members of the middle and upper classes who were willing to help them in their struggle for the franchise. Enmity between the two classes was folly, as "there was not a working man who would not like to be a master tomorrow if he could, and rightly so; and if the working classes were well paid, the middle-classes benefited thereby, for the people were their best customers."<sup>8</sup> Referring to the disturbance of Anti-Corn Law meetings, the speaker declared that "if the working classes had been to blame for disturbing meetings—and he did not palliate their conduct—the middle class were also to blame for the way in which they were accustomed to speak of the working classes."<sup>9</sup>

At the conclusion of Vincent's address the Reverend J. P. Mursell ascended the platform, in compliance with Cooper's request, to express his agreement with what had been said in favor of Universal Suffrage. The working classes, he said, had studied Euclid sufficiently to know that the greater involves the less; that the Chartist attitude towards the League should be, "If you will unite with us for Universal Suffrage, then we will unite with you for the repeal of the Corn Laws." The struggle now was not between mere parties but between Aristocracy and Democracy. "From henceforth," the minister concluded, "this arm is bared in defense of Universal Suffrage."<sup>10</sup> But

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<sup>8</sup> *Northern Star*, November 27, 1841.

<sup>9</sup> Referring in 1861 to the altered tone of the young gentlemen of that day in speaking of the working classes, Kingsley wrote: "Thirty years ago, and even later, the young men of the labouring classes were 'the cads,' 'the snobs,' 'the blackguards,' looked on with dislike, contempt, and fear, which they were not slow to return, and which were but too ready to vent themselves on both sides in ugly words and deeds." Kingsley's own class prejudice manifests itself in his explanation that the feeling described was due to "luddite riots, meal mobs, farm riots, riots everywhere; Captain Swing and the rick-burners; Peterloo "massacres," Bristol conflagrations, and all the ugly sights and rumors which made young lads thirty or forty years ago believe [and not wrongly] that the masses were their natural enemies, and that they might have to fight, any year or any day, for the safety of their property and the honour of their sisters." *Alton Locke*—Preface to the Undergraduates of Cambridge University.

<sup>10</sup> *Northern Star*, November 27, 1841.

Mr. Mursell never attended another Chartist meeting. He became a supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union of Joseph Sturge, and as a result within the year he and Cooper [who supported O'Connor] were in open hostility. For a time, however, his presence was hoped for by some of the Shakesperean Chartists. "Where's Parson Bare-arm?" shouted one of \* \* \* them one meeting night, while the room rang with laughter."<sup>11</sup>

At the close of Vincent's address a vote of thanks to the lecturer was proposed by J. F. Winks, who said that although there were some things he could have wished had not been said, or had been said differently, he felt that the general tendency of the speaker's remarks had been to promote a better feeling. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mursell, but Bairstow rose at once to propose the amendment "That the sole bond of union between the middle and working classes must be based on the right of the latter to a full, free, and righteous representation in Parliament." Mr. Kempson, a manufacturer thereupon arose to inquire whether Corn Law Repeal would not diminish the power of the aristocracy, and thereby secure greater power to the people for obtaining fuller privileges. To this Mr. Mursell replied that he would say to the working class, "Support the repeal of the Corn Laws, but never at the expense of your own rights." He regretted the Chartist interruption of former League meetings alluded to by Mr. Kempson, but hoped the pacific manner in which this meeting had been conducted might prove a sign that a better spirit was gaining ground, a delusive hope, as after events were to prove. Mr. Winks, after a little hesitation, consented to withdraw his original motion, although he quite agreed with Mr. Kempson that the first and best thing would be for the working class to get a good bellyful, and then try their theories. Before putting the amendment to a vote, Cooper proceeded to justify his conduct in having proposed his amendment at the Corn Law meeting in the market-place. He frankly confessed,

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<sup>11</sup> *Life*, pp. 180-181.

however, that at that meeting "he had been more bitter in his personalities than he should have been, owing to the fierce opposition he met with." The Bairstow amendment was then carried unanimously.<sup>12</sup>

The Leicester Chartists at the time of Cooper's coming to that city were under the leadership of John Markham, who had also at one time been a shoemaker and a Methodist local preacher. The feeling between the two men was at first cordial; in fact Cooper's original editorial address was "Mr. Markham's, Belgrave Gate, Leicester," and when Markham was expelled by the Methodists upon the ground that it was injurious to the cause of Christ for church members to take a conspicuous part in politics, Cooper published an indignant editorial upon the subject in the *Illuminator*. Unfortunately for their continued friendship, Cooper's zeal and activity led, as we have seen, to a rapid increase in Chartist numbers, and many of the new members naturally looked to him as their leader. This was bound to cause ill-feeling, as did also Cooper's rapid rise in prominence through his editorial and preaching work and his entry into politics. The coolness thus inaugurated ripened into concealed enmity, and finally broke out into open rupture. Cooper was rightly so ashamed of his part in this trouble that he omitted all reference to it in his autobiography, contenting himself with the statement that he and

Markham continued friendly for some time. But himself and a few others began to show signs of coldness in the course of the autumn, and went back to the little old room at all Saints Open, and constituted themselves a separate Chartist Association. So I proposed that we should take a new name; and as we now held our meetings in the "Shakesperean Room" [of the Ducrow Amphitheatre] we styled ourselves "The Shakesperean Association of Leicester Chartists."<sup>13</sup>

Behind this bald statement lies a lively feud, accounts of which filled the columns of the Leicester papers, and even of the London press, for many days. As Cooper's

<sup>12</sup> *Northern Star*, November 27, 1841

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, p. 163.

organization of Shakesperean Chartists is mentioned in the *Northern Star* as early as January 22, 1842, it is evident that the split in organization occurred before the public quarrel, for which it doubtless paved the way. The fundamental cause of the disagreement was undoubtedly Cooper's enthusiastic and uncritical support of O'Connor and Markham and the older Chartists' insistence upon holding fast to the moral force ideals of Lovett.

The trouble between the leaders of the rival organizations came to a climax as the result of an exchange of letters, the first dated December 5, 1841, being from Markham to Cooper. The last paragraph read:

Let me in conclusion advise you [if not prepared to award me that justice you invariably demand for yourself when insulted] to cease to allude to me in terms of reproach. On all occasions, both public and private, omit my name if you think proper. If you cannot, will not, do this, then write with me in requisition to the mayor for the use of the Town Hall, and let the matter at issue between us be decided by a jury of our fellow-townsmen, but with seven days notice of trial. A fearful alternative, it may be, and one I don't wish for, but from which, if need be, I will not shrink.<sup>14</sup>

To this letter Cooper sent the following foolish and inflammatory reply:

Are you mad that you ask me to join you in procuring the Guild Hall for a public meeting? Do you think I can be so faithless to Chartism as to give an occasion for making it a laughing-stock with the public? Can you divine no reason why I used that epithet 'Judas' with regard to you?

Markham—if I have to tell the public why I used such a term you would have to leave Leicester. You can guess what I mean.

Now I am willing, for the sake of Chartism, to pass by that crime of yours—leaving it to God and your own soul as a religious man. I am willing to work with you as before, and that will be little, for it is but little you have worked with me. I am willing to stand by you as a Chartist—yes, and to protect you—for you will need protection, I can tell you. Only you must cease to make any more splutter about insult and such stuff. I will do the same,

<sup>14</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, February 12, 1842.

and at the meeting at all Saints Open next Monday night, I will state openly the retraction I gave you privately. I mean in the same terms.

Please yourself whether you accept the invitation. I have entreated and prayed you till I shall do it no more.<sup>15</sup>

This toplofty and pharisaical reply—for the basis of the talk of “Judas,” “crime,” etc., was nothing more serious than Markham’s dealings with the Tories, secret it is true, but of the same general character as Cooper’s own—elicited the following vigorous reply from Markham:

Please take into consideration \* \* \* my proposal for a public meeting. Retract it you shall not. Cease to insult and slander me, or like a man, a Chartist [for I assume that means one who loves and carries out the principles of justice in the most comprehensive sense of the word], prove the truth of the faithless term “Judas” in the most public manner. \* \* \* I do not know why you use such a term, unless you refer to the John Smith affair [John Smith was a disguised writer for the *Illuminator* some months earlier, about whom Cooper and Markham had had some sharp words]. If so, expose it; if anything else, do likewise.

Your exposé drive me from Leicester? If in my conduct there is anything towards Chartism so bad as to make me deserve the above appellation, the man is a “Judas” to the cause who can blink it and suffer the people to be imposed upon. Tell me not, sir, that for the sake of Chartism, your anxiety to help me, my need of help, etc.—to all such “bullskutter” as my poor old father used to call it, I say “fudge.” You must try bombastic strains more terrific before you can alarm a well wisher to genuine Chartism. \* \* \* Should this influence you to forbear longer to exercise that kindness which “keeps me in Leicester” pray give me notice of the charge, according to Chartist uses. \* \* \* A fair stage under any circumstances I will give—no more I ask.<sup>16</sup>

In response to this defiance Cooper submitted the following bizarre list of charges to the Chartist Association, evidently stipulating that they should be tried *in camera*:

1. That Markham had told Cooper Mr. Smart was a man of no principle.
2. That he had refused to assist Cooper in his Sunday preaching.
3. That he had received money from the Tories for help at Nottingham and elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, February 12, 1842.

4. That he had refused to nominate Cooper in the Leicester elections.
5. That he had found fault with Cooper for fulsome adulation of Feargus O'Connor.
6. That he had attempted to overthrow Feargus O'Connor at the last election.
7. That Markham and his friends were "New Move" men [i.e. supporters of Sturge's newly organized Complete Suffrage Union].

It will be noticed that the last three of the charges are based on Markham's adherence to Lovett. The Secretary of the National Chartist Association, Campbell, was sent to Leicester to investigate Cooper's charges. Markham strenuously opposed a private hearing, insisting that the utmost publicity be given to the trial, in justice to his character, and for the honor of Chartism. His request was granted, and a digest of the proceedings was published in the local papers, and reproduced by several of the metropolitan dailies.

Cooper refused to appear at the trial, because of the public nature of the hearings, which accordingly took place without him. Markham presented his reply to Cooper's charges on February 7th, and denounced him as a tyrant and calumniator who would leave Leicester as he had left other places. Upon the conclusion of Markham's defense the following two resolutions were carried:

That this meeting \* \* \* see nothing in his [i. e. Markham's] conduct inimical to the principles of the People's Charter, and they still deem him entitled to the confidence of the National Chartist Association.

That this meeting views the conduct of Mr. Cooper in bringing charges against Mr. Markham without notice of his intending to do so, his assenting first to allow Mr. Markham a week to prepare his defence and then, as soon as Mr. Markham had retired, moving his expulsion as a traitor thus constituting himself prosecutor, witness, judge, jury, and executioner—and his subsequent refusal to meet a joint committee to inquire into the facts which he had previously asserted, as a line of conduct not to be tolerated in civilized society, disgraceful to himself as a man, and such as no sincere Chartist and lover of justice is capable of towards his fellow-man."

Though he refused to attend the hearing, Cooper did not hesitate to reply to Markham's letters in the *Mercury*, which printed both men's communications on its front page. It was at this time that the details of the Tory bribery of the previous year came to light. Sufficient space, however, has already been devoted to this unfortunate quarrel. Its disclosures furnished occasion for severe editorial denunciation of both Chartists and Tories, both Markham and Cooper, by the *Leicestershire Mercury*, the *Leicester Herald*, the *Leicester Chronicle*, and the London *Globe*, *Sun*, and *Morning Chronicle*.

Markham pleaded guilty to one of Cooper's charges, that of refusing to assist him in his Sunday preaching, giving as his reason that he thought the lives of men who preached the gospel ought to be consistent with its teaching, and he felt that those who "swear and damn and sink" ought not to be allowed to preach. To this Cooper replied, "I acknowledge with unfeigned regret that I have, in moments of impetuous feeling, used profane language. But I will swear no more. Workingmen, you who are attached to Cooper because you think he is worthy of attachment, imitate his example in this respect. Never deny a fault, but confess it when you are rebuked, though it be an enemy, and above all reform."

To return to the subject of the Shakesperean Association, we have seen that after the split between the old and the new leader Cooper secured quarters in Ducrow's Amphitheatre, one of the largest buildings in town. Here he rented, at first only by the week, the large first floor room in the front of the building which had formerly been used as a dressing-room for equestrians, and which for some unknown reason was called the Shakesperean Room. The name appealed to Cooper and the new organization was accordingly called the Shakesperean Association. The two Chartist groups existed peacefully if not harmoniously.

side by side,<sup>18</sup> though it was the younger branch which was most active.

Besides political meetings once or twice a week Cooper also "lectured on Milton, and repeated portions of 'Paradise Lost'; on Shakespeare and reported portions of 'Hamlet'; on Burns, and repeated 'Tam o' Shanter.'" <sup>19</sup> Another of his activities was the organization of an adult school for men and boys who had no time to obtain the rudiments of an education except Sunday. In this school the better educated members of the Shakesperean Association assisted Cooper as volunteer teachers. The books used were the Old and New Testaments, Channing's *Self-Culture*, and other forgotten tracts; and the different groups were called by such names as the Andrew Marvel Class, the John Hampden Class, and the John Milton Class. Other worthies similarly honored included Algernon Sydney, William Cobbet, Major Cartwright, and George Washington. Cooper claims that at one time five hundred men were receiving instruction in reading, writing, and other elementary subjects in his classes. It is undoubtedly true that "Many young men who lived to enjoy better times received their first stimulus to intellectual effort in the Shakesperean Room at Leicester."<sup>20</sup>

When he was accused of not spending all of the money collected for the adult school upon its maintenance, Cooper published a statement showing all receipts and expenditures from the founding of the school to the date of publication. The contributions amounted to a total of £10 4s. 0½d. and the name of no prominent Tory or Chartist appeared among the contributors. Expenses were chiefly for rent, books, repairs, fires, ink. At the end of his letter Cooper appealed for further funds to carry on the work.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> West has made the curious error of combining the meeting places of the two Leicester Chartist Associations into one. "Cooper's band, he writes, "held its meetings in [the] Shakesperean Room at All Saints Open." *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 169.

<sup>20</sup> Peers, Robert, "Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist," *Journal of Adult Education* [England] October, 1931.

<sup>21</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, March 5, 1842.

The problem of finding a place for the popular Sunday night preaching services during bad weather was solved by holding these meetings, also, in the Shakesperean Room. For use at these gatherings Cooper called for contributions of original Chartist hymns, which he first published in the weekly *Extinguisher*, and then had gathered together to form a *Shakesperean Chartist Hymn Book*. The largest number of these political hymns were the work of John Bramwich and William Jones.<sup>22</sup> They were sung to such well known tunes as "Calcutta" and "Old Hundredth"; and to judge from the specimens quoted by Cooper, were as sadly lacking in merit as poetry as they were full of fervor for the Charter.

The Shakesperean Association was frequently referred to as the "Shakesperean Brigade," and Cooper himself was referred to as its "General." This title, which was bestowed upon him by his followers, Cooper says he accepted in sport at first, and "afterwards it was not easy to lay it aside."<sup>23</sup> Over his starving followers, one observer remarked, Cooper "exercised the power of a king; he had but to command, and they were sure to obey."<sup>24</sup> That the Brigade was at least partially military in character is indicated by the following:

#### CHARTIST COMMISSION

In consideration of high and important services rendered by our valiant and intrepid comrade Serjeant Senior of the Bastille Mill Brigade, we do hereby empower him [by virtue of the trust

<sup>22</sup> Cooper gives the following information regarding these two individuals. "John Bramwich, the elder of these two persons, was a stocking weaver, and was now about fifty years old. He had been a soldier, and had seen service in the West Indies and America. He was a grave serious man, the very heart of truth and sincerity. He died of sheer exhaustion from hard labour and want in the year 1846. William Jones \* \* \* was a much younger man, of very pleasing manners and appearance. He was what is called a 'glove-hand,' and therefore earned better wages than a stockinger. He published a small volume of very excellent poetry at Leicester in 1853, and died in 1855, being held in high respect by a large circle of friends." *Life*, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

confided to us by the democracy] to take the style and title of Colonel Senior, of the Bastille Mill Brigade, to have and to hold during the period of his fidelity to the Rights of Labour.

Given at Head Quarters  
11, Church Street, Leicester,  
this seventh day of June, 1842

COOPER  
General of the Shakespeare Brigade<sup>\*\*</sup>

While the temporary good times of 1841 lasted Cooper was able to keep his followers well in hand.

He kept their minds occupied, prevented them from brooding, interested them in recreative pursuits \* \* \*. In general Cooper succeeded in brightening and cheering the lives of many who would otherwise have fallen victims to despair. He believed, and taught his followers to believe, in the vague and vain promises of O'Connor that the Charter would be carried \* \* \*. By means of the magic of uniforms and badges Cooper developed a really ferocious esprit-de-corps among his followers, who idolized him. But he was not content with demonstrations. He took the pains to give his disciples education in an adult school, and amusement of the right sort.<sup>\*\*</sup>

However, the terrible year of 1842, with its strikes, riots, and "plug plots" eventually broke down all merely ameliorative activities, and produced in Cooper himself such a fever of recklessness and despair as finally brought him to a prison cell.

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<sup>\*\*</sup> *North Staffordshire Mercury*, September 10, 1842 Cooper claims that "the term 'Brigade' was very commonly used by Chartists in lieu of society." [Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 445]. I can only say that I have found no other example of such use of the term. To Hovell's query "Is it too far a cry to assume that Cooper was the originator of ideas afterwards developed by William Booth at Nottingham?" [*Op. cit.*, p. 211] the reply must be that while it is possible, it does not seem probable. Booth as a lad took a keen interest in the Sturge election contest in Nottingham, a contest in which both Cooper and O'Connor took a prominent part, and the Shakesperians had marched in Nottingham. But the Salvation Army was not organized until 1877, some thirty-six years after the disappearance of the Shakespearian Brigade, while, as for Booth's title, this seems to have been developed by accident from his earlier designation of General Superintendent. See Begbie, Harold, *Life of General William Booth*, N. Y., 1920 [two vols.] 1; 404-405.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 211.

## CHAPTER XI

### QUARRELS WITH THE CORN LAW LEAGUE AND COMPLETE SUFFRAGE UNION

The beginning of the year 1842 saw the complete shut-down of the hosiery trade in Leicester. The misery which followed was terrible. "I had seen wretchedness enough before," Cooper declares, "but now, when employ ceased for thousands, and that for months, the distress was appalling."<sup>1</sup> Begging processions were seen in the streets, one of them led by a man in a red coat and cast-off soldier's cap whom Gammage mistakenly identified as the Shakespearean General.<sup>2</sup> But Cooper states emphatically that he never led a begging procession, although in the auto-biography he tells how

one afternoon, without counselling me, some five hundred of the men who were out of work formed a procession and marched through the town at a slow step, singing and begging all the way. \* \* \* It wrung my heart to see a sight like that in England. They got but little, and I advised them never to repeat it.<sup>3</sup>

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, remembered these terrible days in Nottingham nearby. Though he was at that time only thirteen years old Booth declared he could never forget

the degradation and helpless misery of the poor stockingers of my native town, wandering gaunt and hunger-stricken through the streets, droning out their melancholy ditties, crowding the union [poor house], or toiling like galley slaves on relief works for bare subsistence.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219. This error, with others of a similar nature, was corrected by the publication of Cooper's letter in the Appendix to editions after the first.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Preface to *Darkest England*; quoted by Harold Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Another picture "printed on his soul with a sharpness that could not be blurred" was that of ragged children crying for bread in the streets of Nottingham.<sup>5</sup>

As times grew worse Cooper gave up the sale of bread in his little shop for a few weeks, "but several of the most necessitous declared that they must perish if he did not let them have bread."<sup>6</sup> As a result he was within a short time some sixty-six pounds in debt to his baker.<sup>7</sup> The winter of 1841-1842, a modern historian has stated,

was one of the worst, in an industrial and economic sense, through which England has ever passed. \* \* \* One person in every eleven was a pauper;<sup>8</sup> 12,000 families were supported by charity in Manchester, and in Birmingham one fifth of the entire population was in receipt of poor relief. From most of the manufacturing centers \* \* \* came the same tale of unemployment, distress, and starvation. The condition of things was appalling, and many remedies were proposed. The Chartists proposed electoral reform.<sup>9</sup>

One of the effects of the hard times was the wiping out of Cooper's weekly publications. The first to go, at the beginning of 1842, was the *Extinguisher*. But it proved difficult to hold the adherents to the Chartist cause together without a paper, nor was it possible to expose the iniquities of the "bagmen" outside of a workers' periodical; so that after a few weeks Cooper began a third paper called the *Commonwealthsman*. This lasted for nearly five months, the circulation being extended by means of agents to Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Stafford, and the Potteries. But with the falling off of trade in these towns the sales of the *Commonwealthsman* fell off also, and after twenty issues this third periodical suffered the fate of its predecessors. A fourth weekly, the *Chartist Pioneer*, never got beyond the second week of publication. In a

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Life*, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 445. Cooper's old servant Alfred Ash assured me that every cent of this debt was ultimately discharged.

<sup>8</sup> "1,429,089, nearly one tenth of the population," according to Trevelyan, G. M., *Life of John Bright*, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Marriott, J. A. R., *England Since Waterloo*, N. Y., 1913, pp. 161-162.

letter addressed to the subscribers of the successive periodicals, Cooper in July thus reviewed their rise and fall:

For more than twelve months I have battled with difficulties almost indescribable, under the genuine hope that I should be able to establish an unstamped [and unfettered] assistant to our glorious cause. The *Illuminator* was put an end to by Whig electioneering malice. The *Rushlight* and *Extinguisher* were half-penny substitutes for a little periodical \* \* \* [which] the schemes of hypocritical faction strangled \* \* \* The *Commonwealthsman* was started with a view to renewing the existence of a paper as useful as the *Illuminator* had been, but the dreadful increase of poverty among our ranks compelled me to relinquish that enterprise also at the twentieth number. Since then I have attempted to renew the existence of another half-penny Chartist organ. The *Chartist Pioneer*, however, has met with impassable obstacles in the second week of his march; in other words the horrible poverty which stares upon us so ghastly on every hand, compels us to desist altogether from publication. By the kind permission of my friend John Cleave I shall, however, address you frequently, though briefly, through the pages of the *Chartist Circular*.<sup>10</sup>

About a month after penning the above Cooper was locked up in Stafford Jail, from whence he contributed a series of articles to the *Chartist Circular* regarding the unjust sentence of his fellow-prisoner William Ellis.

All during these terrible months the Sunday evening services were continued without interruption. "How fierce my discourses became now, in the market-place on Sunday evenings," he writes in his autobiography. "I wonder that I restrained myself at all. My heart often burned with an indignation I knew not how to express."<sup>11</sup>

It was probably at one of these out-door meetings that Anthony John Mundella, then a lad of fifteen, but afterwards M. P. from Sheffield and member of one of Gladstone's Cabinets, came forward under the spell of Cooper's eloquence to be enrolled on the people's side as a Chartist. He did not come again, however, as his family shortly afterwards moved away from Leicester.

As times grew harder the adult school which formed so important a part of Shakesperean Association activities,

<sup>10</sup> *Northern Star*, July 9, 1842.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 173.

was compelled to close down, "partly because the fine weather drew the men into the fields, and partly because they were too despairing to care about learning to read." <sup>12</sup> As one of the more profane members expressed it when Cooper urged the men not to forsake the school, "What the hell do we care about reading if we can get nought to eat." <sup>13</sup>

To illustrate the actual starvation from which the operatives were suffering at this time, Cooper told of two cases which came under his direct observation.<sup>14</sup>

A poor frame-work knitter, whom I knew to be as true as steel, concealed the fact of his deep suffering from me for several weeks, though I saw the change in his dress, and knew that he must have pawned all but the mere rags he was wearing. He was frequently with me in the shop, rendering kindly help. I spoke to him one night about his case, but some one came into the shop and interrupted me, and he suddenly retired. At eleven o'clock, just before we were about to close the shop, he came in hastily, laid a bit of paper on my desk, and ran out. On the bit of paper he revealed his utter destitution, and the starvation and suffering of his young wife and child. On the previous morning, the note informed me, his wife awoke, saying "Sunday come again, and nothing to eat"—and as the babe sought the breast there was no milk.<sup>15</sup> Nature's fountains were dried up by starvation.<sup>16</sup>

He continues:

About the same time—I think it was in the same week—another poor stockinger rushed into my house, and throwing himself wildly on a chair exclaimed with an execration, "I wish they would hang me! I have lived on cold potatoes that were given me these two days; and this morning I have eaten a raw potato from sheer hunger! Give me a bit of bread and a cup of coffee, or I shall drop!" I should not like to see again a human face with the look of half insane despair which that poor man's countenance wore."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> This and the anecdote which follows were first published in the 1843 pamphlet *Address to the Jury* by Thomas Cooper [p. 16] and transcribed into the autobiography practically unchanged.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> *Address to the Jury*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Life*, pp. 172-173; cf. *Address to the Jury*, p. 16.

Experiences, such as these drove the strong-minded among the working-class into scepticism. Cooper tells how the real feeling of this class was fully expressed one day in the market-place when we were holding a meeting in the week. A poor religious stockinger said, "Let us be patient a little longer, lads. Surely God Almighty will help us soon." "Talk no more about thy Goddle Mighty," was the sneering rejoinder. "There isn't one. If there *was* one he wouldn't let us suffer as we do."<sup>18</sup>

The feeling of distrust and even of hatred, on the part of the workers towards the Anti-Corn Law League, an organization whose main support came from their employers, can easily be understood if the miserable conditions prevailing at this time are kept in mind. Cooper states that he held aloof from the frequent Chartist attacks upon Anti-Corn Law meetings.

I never suffered any meeting to be held by the Chartists while I was leader in Leicester to oppose the repeal of the Corn Laws. It was part of Chartist policy in many towns to disturb Corn Law Repeal meetings. I never disturbed one, and never suffered my party to do it. The Leicester Whigs *said we did*. But it was a falsehood. We were called disturbers as soon as we had entered a meeting, and before we had spoken.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to reconcile this claim with all of the facts. How heartily he was hated by the Whigs is indicated by a happening in February, 1842. The Shakespereans were just concluding a Monday night meeting when a Chartist hurried into the room to inform Cooper that the crowd was making trouble for the League speakers at a meeting in the Town Hall, and that if he would go there he would be able to get a hearing. The "General" accompanied by all the Shakespereans present immediately set off for the fray.

The Town Hall, however, was so densely crammed that Mr. Cooper was desired on arriving to go round to the parlour door. He did so—and in two minutes was seized by a furious and malicious crew, who laid hold, some of his legs, others of his arms; and one

<sup>18</sup> *Life*, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 181. The Corn Law meeting of 1841 which he had so successfully heckled he seems to have regarded merely as an attack upon the Whigs in revenge for their suppression of the *Illuminator*.

fiend-like being, gathering Mr. Cooper's cloak in his grasp, pulled with all his might, in such a manner that [the coat being fastened by a brass chain around the neck] the wearer was nearly throttled. "Knock him on the head!" "Damn him, do for him!" were the encouragements given by some to this rough handling. Finding his enemies were really intent on something serious, and feeling his strength fast failing, Mr. Cooper at last shouted, "Murder—they are killing me!" The working men present now understood what was going on—rushed to the rescue—and with great exertion brought Mr. C. upon the table, where he clung to the chains of the gas light for support. \* \* \* To the honour of Mr. John Biggs, the late Mayor, be it recorded that as soon as he could reach Mr. Cooper from the Chair [which he occupied] he put out his hand and pulled Mr. C. beside him into the chair, thus placing him in safety. The meeting was one continued scene of clamour until the Corn Law repealers retired, when Mr. Cooper addressed the still crowded Guildhall for a short time, and was then conducted to his house in Church Gate by hundreds of working men shouting in triumph through the streets. The crowd which assembled around the house soon numbered about two thousand, and Mr. Cooper was compelled to ascend the leads, and address them for a short time.<sup>20</sup>

The personal popularity of Cooper, combined with the effect of the hard times, led to a rapid growth in his organization. By May 1842 the enrollment in the Shakespearean Association had reached a total of 1300. Whole groups of workingmen were admitted at a time, seventy shoemakers coming in at two successive meetings.<sup>21</sup>

As summer drew on, and fine weather began to be more common, Cooper extended his propaganda work into the outlying villages. In company with some of his workless followers—twenty accompanied him to Wigston and Qadsby—he addressed the inhabitants of the villages of Anstey and Glenn, Countessthorp and Earl Shilton, Hinckly, Syston, and Mount Sorrel. In the last-named place there was an outdoor pulpit of syenite, from which Cooper addressed the multitude, who sat around and above him on the stones of a large quarry.<sup>22</sup> Both week day addresses and Sunday sermons proclaimed the importance

<sup>20</sup> *Northern Star*, February 19, 1842.

<sup>21</sup> *Northern Star*, May 14, 1842.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 174.

of procuring the rights set forth by the Charter. In the outlying villages those interested in supporting the Chartist Association were assisted to set up local units. Associations were thus formed by Cooper at Thurmaston, Oadsby, and Wigston, numbering 43 members in the former, and 36 in each of the latter.<sup>23</sup>

One of the methods which Cooper devised for keeping up the spirits of his poverty-pinched following was singing and marching through the streets.

As the poor Leicester stockingers had so little work [he writes] they used to crowd around my shop door early in the evening, and I had to devise some way of occupying them. Sometimes I would deliver them a speech; but, more generally, on the fine evenings, we used to form a procession of four or five in a rank, and troop through the streets singing the following triplet to the air of "Rule Britannia:"

Spread, spread the Charter—  
Spread the Charter through the land!  
Let Britons bold and brave join heart and hand!

or chanting "The Lion of Freedom," \* \* \* [a song attributed to me, but I never wrote a line of it: it was the composition of a Welsh Chartist woman]<sup>24</sup> the words of which were as follows:

The Lion of Freedom is come from his den!  
We'll rally around him, again and again:  
We'll crown him with laurel, our champion to be:  
O'Connor the patriot: for sweet Liberty!

The pride of the people—he's noble and brave—  
A terror to tyrants—a friend to the slave:  
The bright star of Freedom—the noblest of men:  
We'll rally around him, again and again . . .

Though proud daring tyrants his body confined  
They never could conquer his generous mind:  
We'll hail our caged lion, now freed from his den:  
We'll rally around him again and again.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Star*, May 14, 1842.

<sup>24</sup> *Life*, p. 160; cf. Gammage, R. G. *op. cit.*, p. 446.

<sup>25</sup> These verses are a parody of the old "Shouting Methodist" hymn "The Lion of Judah." As for the tune, Valentine Woolley, "a Leicester working man, first set it to an air [or rather fragment of the melody of a glee]; we adopted it; and it is perfectly true that \* \* \*. I spread it wherever I went." [Cooper's letter to Gammage, *loc. cit.*]

The popularity of this song will serve to show how firmly O'Connor was fixed in the regard of a portion of the manufacturing operatives, as the uncorrupted advocate of freedom. As a consequence they immediately suspected the honesty of any local leader who did not rank himself under the banner of Feargus.<sup>26</sup>

This singing through the streets, often accompanied by shouts for the Charter, in Cooper's opinion "had no harm in it," although as he admits, "many of the shopkeepers would shut up their shops in real or affected terror [which] only caused our men to laugh, since all knew that there was no thought of injuring anybody."<sup>27</sup>

Looking back on these events in 1878 Cooper sensibly observed:

It was not simply a few ragged Chartists in Leicester who were expecting a change. It was expected in all our industrial regions . . . Manufacturers declared things could not go on much longer as they were. They began to threaten that they would close their mills, or, as the Tories interpreted the threats, to try to precipitate a revolution! The speeches of Richard Cobden, John Bright, Joseph Sturge \* \* \* James Acland, and a host of less powerful agitators, had not only stirred up a strong feeling of discontent, but had excited a confident expectation of relief.

Now thirty years have passed away I can see how much poor Chartists resembled the fly on the wheel during that period of political agitation. But men far more experienced than myself thought that Chartism would succeed before Corn Law Repeal; that a great change was at hand, and that the change would not be Free Trade, but a great enlargement of the franchise, and the accompanying political demands embodied in the Charter.<sup>28</sup>

Among those who believed that the Six Points should be demanded as well as the repeal of the Corn Laws was the public-spirited Quaker Joseph Sturge. In the spirit of Miall's *Nonconformist* articles calling for "Reconciliation between the Middle and Working Classes," Sturge founded the Complete Suffrage Union, an organization designed to bridge the chasm between the two classes.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 177.

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, p. 178.

Himself a prominent member of the Anti-Corn Law League, Sturge began by attempting to enlist that body under the standard of complete suffrage; and was able to interest a number of Leaguers in his ideas.

After a preliminary meeting at the close of the League Conference in Manchester in November 1841, he issued an appeal to the working classes which became known as the Sturge Manifesto. In this he invited all who approved his efforts at union to attend a conference at Birmingham to discuss plans of organization and the presentation to Parliament of resolutions in favor of complete suffrage.

At the close of the League conference in London in February 1842 another meeting of the Union was held which was attended by Sharmon Crawford, M. P., the Reverend Thomas Spencer, uncle of the philosopher, and John Bright, among others, as well as by a handful of Chartists. William Lovett seized the opportunity to tell the Free Traders that one of the principal reasons for Chartist opposition to the League was the workers' conviction that it was primarily a middle class attack upon Chartism, the practically simultaneous organization of the two movements being regarded by Chartists as something more than mere coincidence.

After the Sturge organization got under way it attracted most of the moral force element in the Chartist ranks, so that very soon not only Lovett, but O'Brien and Vincent, and the Christian Chartists O'Neill and Collins had also declared in its favor. All these men were avowed enemies of O'Connor, who viewed the new movement with alarm as a serious threat to his own supremacy, and accordingly denounced it as a dodge of the Corn Law League, declaring that "Complete Suffrage was Complete Humbug."

Cooper aligned himself with O'Connor in opposition to the new organization, for he "saw no honest reason for deserting him, and getting up a 'Complete Suffrage Union' if the people who got it up meant practically what we meant as Chartists. The working men said there was deceit behind the cry of 'Complete Suffrage,' and I main-

tained their saying.”<sup>29</sup> “The immense majority of Chartists,” he says elsewhere, “in Leicestershire as well as other towns regarded him [O’Connor] as the only disinterested and incorruptible leader. I adopted this belief, because it was the belief of the people; and I opposed Bronterre O’Brien, and Henry Vincent, and all who opposed O’Connor, or refused to act with him. Common sense taught me no cause can be gained by disunion.”<sup>30</sup>

The first conference of the Complete Suffrage Union was held at Birmingham during the month of April 1842.<sup>31</sup> It was attended by 103 delegates, among them such leaders of the middle class as John Bright and Edward Miall; such members of the clergy as H. Solly, Dr. Wade, and Thomas Spencer; and such well-known Chartists as Lovett, O’Brien, Vincent, Collins, O’Neill, Philp, Neesom, Lowry, Richardson, and Brewster, all of whom welcomed an organization free from O’Connor’s influence. This conference was, therefore, more widely representative of all shades of radical opinion than any similar gathering held up to this time.

But the fact that such prominent members of the Union as Sturge, Bright, Miall, and Spencer were also active in the Anti-Corn Law League lent color to O’Connor’s charge that the new movement was a dodge of the League. Cooper’s statement, “We could not think of giving up our demand for the Charter to adopt the new cry for ‘Complete Suffrage’”<sup>32</sup> expressed, moreover, the feeling of all Chartists, even of those who had come over to the Sturge organization, and this feeling of loyalty to the older movement proved the rock upon which the new movement struck and foundered.

Although the organizers of the Complete Suffrage Union had no intention originally of adopting the whole Chartist program, the Chartist delegates by their prompt

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, p. 180; cf. Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 446.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>31</sup> O’Connor called a rival conference to meet in the same city on the same dates, but this counter-attack proved unavailing, and merely increased the bitterness of feeling on both sides.

<sup>32</sup> *Life*, p. 180.

and united efforts under the leadership of Lovett brought about the passage of one after another of the famous six points until the Conference stood committed to the Charter in everything except name. After much debate, some of it exceedingly warm, it was decided to avoid all reference to that document at this meeting, for though the middle class delegates had gone so far as to adopt the Chartist principles they could not bring themselves to accept the Chartist name—a name which to so many of their order signified violence and terrorism. Lovett's motion that a second conference be called, to which a larger number of working class delegates should be invited, was carried unanimously, after amendments calling for the adoption of the Charter had been rejected; and the question of whether the Complete Suffrage Union was to be formally committed to the Chartist cause was thus postponed until the second conference.

In view of the initial success of the new movement, and its adoption of Chartist principles, O'Connor began a strategic change of base. When Sturge agreed to run for Parliament at Nottingham in the election made necessary by the death of Sir G. Larpent and declared for a Chartist-Quaker—Free Trade platform, O'Connor stated that he would support Sturge, rather than the Tory John Walter whom he and the Chartists had supported at the general election of the previous year. Interrogated at a public meeting, Sturge unequivocally pledged himself "to the support of every principle contained in the People's Charter,"<sup>33</sup> and in view of this fact O'Connor declared that he deserved Chartist assistance. Cooper's Shakespere Association, when *Feargus* submitted the question of supporting Sturge to them, voted unanimously in favor of it.<sup>34</sup> This action was taken in May, but as the actual election did not take place until August, consideration of that event will be reserved until the next chapter.

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<sup>33</sup> *Northern Star*, May 25, 1842.  
<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

On May 2, 1842, the second great Petition for the Charter was presented in Parliament by T. S. Duncombe. If Chartist figures be accepted it contained 3,317,702 signatures, and was over six miles long. The huge document had been wound upon an immense reel, which was so large that it was found impossible to introduce it into the parliamentary chamber. It was therefore carried into the House in sections, so that the floor of the legislative chamber assumed eventually the appearance of being carpeted with a snowfall of paper.

On May 3rd Duncombe moved that the petitioners should be heard at the bar of the House, and the motion was supported by Bowring, Leader, and Fielden. Sir James Graham opposed, as did Macaulay, who declared his belief that "universal suffrage would be fatal to all purposes for which Government exists." Peel and Lord John Russell also spoke against Duncombe's motion. Roebuck, spokesman for the Complete Suffrage Union and therefore in favor of working class representation in Parliament, expressed nevertheless his complete abhorrence of "the trashy doctrines of the Petition," which he declared to have been drawn up by "a malignant and cowardly demagogue." This unfortunate reference to O'Connor, together with Macaulay's lurid picture of the confusion and spoliation which he asserted would attend the extension of the vote to the lower classes, effectively killed the Duncombe motion which was lost 49 to 287. Cobden was among the small group who voted in favor of the motion; Palmerston and Gladstone were among the majority of 236 against it. Disraeli escaped the necessity of taking sides by remaining away from the division.<sup>35</sup>

Although the *Northern Star* had freely indulged in threats of some tremendous cataclysm if the petition were a second time rejected, no plan of action except the wild schemes of three or four merely local associations was now brought forward. O'Connor once more counselled a wait-

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<sup>35</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 255-258; West, J., *op. cit.* See also article on T. S. Duncombe in the Dictionary of National Biography.

ing policy, and as he was still supreme in influence, the feeling aroused by the repeated rejection of the Chartist petition—a feeling very strikingly portrayed in Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*—was allowed to evaporate in futile threats and increased bitterness of heart.

In June Markham's All Saints Open Chartists invited O'Brien to Leicester to deliver two addresses. Gammage, the earliest historian of Chartism, was present in Leicester for the occasion, and walked with Cooper to the first of the meetings. He thus described his recollection of what occurred:

A charge of twopence was made for admission to defray expenses; but the physical force Shakespereans burst into the hall without paying, and formed the majority of the meeting, while their General was on the platform to take advantage of his position \* \* \*. He had taught them that the rich were their enemies [which was true enough]; that Joseph Sturge was a rich corn-dealer, and that consequently he could not be honest; and that Bronterre O'Brien was the tool of Sturge, and the enemy of their great chief Feargus O'Connor. He forgot to remind them that though the rich are socially the enemies of the poor, that all ages have furnished some men from their ranks who have had the justice and humanity to plead the cause of the people. The proceedings commenced by Mr. W. D. Taylor being moved to the chair, upon which Mr. Beedham, one of the General's subaltern officers, moved his master to that post. There was a dispute as to which had the majority; but Mr. O'Brien rose and declared that Mr. Cooper was elected; and he took the chair accordingly, and commenced the proceedings by giving out the "Lion of Freedom," which was roared out, rather than sung, by the company. Cooper then sarcastically apologised for the unseemly behavior of his poor fanatic followers by stating that it was owing to their great anxiety to hear the "School-master" [O'Brien], and that they were too poor to pay for admission. He then introduced Mr. O'Brien, who gave one of the most brilliant, as well as instructive, lectures ever delivered from a public platform. From the more intelligent portion of the audience he elicited the loudest applause. He entered into a lucid statement of the part he had taken in the [Sturge] Conference, and declared that for himself he was still for the Charter, details, name and all. Though this declaration was received with tremendous applause by a large portion of the meeting \* \* \* yet, as the General did not applaud, the soldiers remained silent. O'Brien in the course of his observations referred to the Sturge movement, and defended the

right of men fighting for democracy to join or form any association they might please, and that no man had a right to dictate to any other man that he should join the National Chartist Association. This sentiment was loudly cheered by O'Brien's friends; but the Shakespereans remained silent until Cooper, thinking no doubt that the lecturer was beginning to carry conviction farther than was agreeable to the tenets of O'Connorism, started up and exclaimed, "No, no! Chartists, Chartists! and then waved his cap and gave a counter cheer, which the soldiers imitated as implicitly as a child would a parent. Gazing on the faces of that distressed and trampled crowd of men, it was easy to see the elements of which O'Connorism was composed, viz., ignorance and fanaticism. At O'Brien's stern appeals to principle, his masterly arguments and brilliant sallies, there was the ever-listless look, the same vacant stare. It was only at the dictation of the chairman that they displayed any signs of life, and then it was the life of passion and not of reason. O'Brien spoke for about two hours, and was then compelled through illness to conclude, being seized with a fit of vomiting which made it impossible for him to proceed. The circumstances for the moment disarmed even the rancorous devotees of O'Connorism, and Mr. Cooper announced that on that evening he would not put any questions to Mr. O'Brien.<sup>38</sup>

But when O'Brien appeared the following night, he was halted before his second lecture was begun, and required to answer Mr. Cooper's questions. This he did in a reply which occupied one hour and twenty minutes. Cooper then proceeded to answer the reply in most intemperate language, of which the conclusion, as reported by the *Northern Star*, will give an adequate idea.

He stood there [Cooper declared] unflinchingly to proclaim that the once great, intelligent, and patriotic O'Brien was no longer to be regarded as heretofore—that he had yielded to jealousy and envy, and now appeared as the insidious foe of the Charter organization and the sly advocate of middle class schemers. He called on working men to say by holding up their hands whether they approved of the proposition he would now put to them—"That this meeting having listened to Mr. O'Brien's reasons for not being a member of the National Charter Association, and regarding these reasons as so many couched and insidious attacks on the Charter Association, hereby declare they no longer have any faith in Mr. O'Brien. The vast majority of the assembly being workers threw

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\* Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, pp. 220-221.

up their hands in a moment, and when O'Brien appeared again he was met with hooting and derision! Let any "New Mover" come to Leicester—the Shakespereans will teach him what is what.<sup>37</sup>

Gammage declares that Cooper's motion of want of confidence was carried

against the rational portion of the meeting. O'Brien attempted to speak, but in vain; for an incessant clamor was kept up by the General and his troops which baffled all attempts to gain a hearing, and the meeting broke up in the utmost confusion.<sup>38</sup>

The gross unfairness and discourtesy of such treatment of a man of O'Brien's character and record<sup>39</sup> at a meeting intended for the general public, and attended by many men of the middle class, "numbers of whom came to hear Mr. O'Brien though they would not come to hear Mr. O'Connor", Cooper partly atoned for by a published apology. At a later time he attempted to excuse his conduct on this occasion by the following explanation:

Respecting my attachment to O'Connor, the people taught me this attachment; I did not teach it to them. I was assured they had no hope for Chartism but in him. He won me also by his letters, and by his conversation in the few interviews I had with him during my Leicester chieftainship. I saw reason in after time to alter my opinion of him, but during the period I am referring to, I held that *union* was the absolute requisite for Chartist success; and as the people cleaved to O'Connor as their leader I became a foe to all who opposed him as fomenters of *disunion*. For this reason I opposed O'Brien. And I regret my opposition was not enacted in the fairest spirit. I have since apologized to him; and have also publicly intimated to the Leicester people that I considered we did wrong toward him \* \* \*. The truth is, I was the people's instrument rather than their director, even in the stormy contests with O'Brien and others. And it is thus in all ages and in every country, whether on a large or a small scale, that a popular leader keeps his lead: his temperament, nature, and powers fit him by quick sympathy and strong energetic will to become the people's mouth-piece, hand, and arm, either for good or evil.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Northern Star*, June 11, 1842.

<sup>38</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>39</sup> For a brief description of O'Brien's life and work vide Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, chap xxiii.

<sup>40</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 446.

Certainly in 1842 there was no leader more successful than Cooper. In his own district he rivaled O'Connor in popularity, as he was perhaps the only leader who could rival Feargus in activity. A month after the failure of the second Petition, the Shakespereans numbered 1800. The average number of new members was declared to be 30 a day,<sup>41</sup> and one Sunday, after Cooper had spoken three times, 108 enrolled. By the middle of June the Shakesperean Association claimed a membership of 2100 men, women, and youths. One week Cooper held meetings every night except Saturday, and "was nearly done up with exertion." He began now to have the assistance of several volunteer helpers, whose names from this time sprinkle the weekly despatches to the *Northern Star*.

The neighboring hamlets were not neglected, and their associations formed lesser satellites around the central sun of Leicester. By the middle of June the number of members in Thurcaston was 80; in Wigston 80; in Anstey, 50; in Burbage, 60; in Early Shilton, 50; and in Oadley, 40.<sup>42</sup> One explanation for this phenomenal growth was that

to men so situated as these stockingers [who had proved their own helplessness in many a futile strike] the Charter had become a kind of charm or fetish, through which every evil would be exorcised, and every social wrong be avenged \* \* \* Chartism was the grand all-containing Cave of Abdullam for men who were too poor to build their own barriers against oppression.<sup>43</sup>

Another reason was that Cooper always counted as members all who expressed a desire to associate themselves with the national body, whether they ever paid any dues or not, although this was contrary to the rules of the National Association. Yet he was undoubtedly right in holding that intense poverty made it impossible for scores to pay for their cards at this time.

In the balloting for the Executive of the National Chartist Association in June, Cooper's name appeared as

<sup>41</sup> *Northern Star*, June 11, 1842.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, June 18, 1842.

<sup>43</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 210.

a candidate for the first time. The five men who received the largest number of votes constituted the Executive for the ensuing year. On this occasion these were M'Douall, Leach, Campbell, Williams, and Bairstow. Philp was sixth, and Cooper seventh; with 2,454 votes as compared with M'Douall's high of 11,221.<sup>44</sup>

By the beginning of July the Shakespereans had increased to 2300. One meeting in the market place attracted an audience of 2000.<sup>45</sup> In the Amphitheatre Cooper debated against the socialist missionaries, Alexander Campbell and Robert Buchanan, father of the poet of the same name. The question at issue was "Whether is home colonization on cooperative principles [later exemplified by the establishment of New Harmony, Indiana] or the enactment of the People's Charter into law, best calculated to remove national distress, and secure the permanent happiness of the people."<sup>46</sup> The discussion took up two nights, and was conducted "with delightful friendliness," a somewhat unusual circumstance in debates wherein Cooper took part.

By this time the last of Cooper's five ventures into periodical publication had expired. The letter to his subscribers previously quoted closed with the following spirited exhortation.

Chartists, we ought, each and all, to be on fire with the spirit of proselytism. Organize! organize!—that is the word. Of what use are the nominal Chartists? How nearer do they bring the Charter? Let us unceasingly assure them that they can only be of real service by "falling in;" by taking rank in some of our regiments. Talk of fighting! pshaw! who ever heard of an army marching until it was formed into rank and file? Chartists, we want numbers—organized numbers! And then we shall not have to beg for the Charter, we shall be able to take it. By arms? No, but by demanding it as the nation's right, as the object of its temporal will. Let a tenth of the whole population of each considerable town [5000 for Leicester, the same for Nottingham, 10,000 for Sheffield and \* \* \* 200,000 for London] walk through the open streets at the same hour of the same day and cry, "We'll have the

<sup>44</sup> *Northern Star*, June 25, 1842.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, July 9, 1842.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*; cf. *Life*, p. 174.

People's Charter!"—and what can prevent their obtaining it? "The soldiers will be sent from one town to another to put them down?" do you say? Pooh! They will all be wanted at home. And the same with the police force. Let that day and hour be the one on which the House are assembled to consider the Queen's gracious speech on the opening of a Session, and what can prevent the People's Charter from being the Primary Act of Parliament for that very session?

Chartists, think of this, and strain every nerve to swell your ranks—from the working men, I mean. We want real democracy, remember. Let the middle men come if they like; but do not court them. The People's Charter is intended to be preeminently the working man's boon, and let us be resolved to make it so."<sup>4</sup>

For using precisely this same argument in his address at Hanley a month later he was charged by the Government with "sedition."

Towards the end of July Cooper went to Leeds, where he met O'Connor and advised him that in Leicester and its vicinity there was great dissatisfaction with the national officers. At the end of the year, as we shall see, definite charges were brought against the Executive, and Cooper played a prominent part at their hearing.

The Shakespereans broke up two Corn Law meetings during Cooper's absence. The *Northern Star* headed its account of the first affair "Glorious Victory over the combined forces of the Anti-Corn Law League and sham Chartists." The League lecturer, Mr. Murray, when halted at the beginning of his address by a demand for a chairman, announced that he would not submit to dictation, and that if a chairman were forced upon him he would not speak at all. The Shakespereans proceeded nevertheless to elect one of their own number chairman, but Mr. Murray refused to recognize him, to give any address, or to budge from the platform until the time which would have been required for his lecture had expired. Upon his withdrawal Beedham's resolution, "That this meeting pledges itself to agitate for nothing short of the People's Charter" was quickly passed, and after three hearty groans for the

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<sup>4</sup> *Northern Star*, July 9, 1842.

League and three cheers for Cooper in his absence the crowd dispersed.<sup>48</sup>

On the second occasion, although only League supporters and All Saints Open Chartists had been supplied with tickets, the Shakespereans again put in appearance, this time under the direction of Bairstow, who demanded that the lecturer allow discussion from the floor at the close of his lecture. This being flatly refused, Bairstow announced that he himself would expose the humbug of the League in a lecture at the market-place, and desired all working men in the audience, declared to number 1200, to follow him. "No sooner said than done. Instantly the working men rose in one dense body, and amid the most terrific yelling, groaning, and hooting, left thirty repealers all alone in their glory, while Mr. Murray stared the most ghastly astonishment." In the market-place "Mr. Bairstow gave it to the Repealers for full two hours." He also sent enough Chartists back to the Murray meeting to carry the Charter against Corn Law Repeal at its close. "We call this," the account concludes, "keeping up steam while the General is away."<sup>49</sup>

Although Chartists accomplished nothing by this practice of interfering with League meetings, such outbreaks on the part of poor and uneducated men, stirred by passion and resentment, were perfectly natural.

The disturbance of opposition meetings was as much a symptom of helplessness as anything else. It was a counsel of despair, and it is unfortunate that the *Northern Star* writers, who ought to have known better, should have encouraged this vain and absurd practice by declaiming in big headlines about "triumphant victories" over the League \* \* \* and by assuming to believe that such "victories" were rendering service to their cause.<sup>50</sup>

In support of his claim that he himself never disturbed the meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League, Cooper relates how at one large meeting of that organization in the market-place he and a few of his Chartist friends were

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Northern Star*, July 23, 1842.

<sup>50</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219.

allowed on the platform. When the speeches were over and the proposition was put to the meeting, he held up his hand and called to his party, "who composed a large part of the crowd—'Now, Chartist!' and every man of them held up his hand for Corn Law Repeal." Cooper then proposed a resolution in favor of the People's Charter, which was also carried by the meeting with but one dissenting vote.<sup>51</sup>

He did not behave so well, however, when Vincent, another supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union, again came to Leicester. The Vincent meeting was held in the New Hall under the joint auspices of the Anti-Corn Law League and the Complete Suffrage Union. Bearing in mind Mr. Murray's experience earlier this same month, Sturgeites and All Saints Chartist were admitted at a special entrance, while the Shakespereans cooled their heels before the main entrance, under the eye of three policemen. At length, however, Cooper's followers were also admitted, as many as there still remained room for, "amidst blows, kicks, cuffs, yellings, and confusion almost indescribable," and Cooper and Beedham proceeded to scale the platform, which had been reserved for the committee. Vincent, and his chairman Mr. Mursell [Parson Barearm] made their appearance after some delay. Cooper called for an elected chairman, and nominated Beedham, who was supported vociferously by "a thousand Shakespereans." When members of the Complete Suffrage Union forcibly held Mr. Mursell in the chair, Beedham sat upon the table. For half an hour a fiery altercation took place upon the platform, and Mursell, Beedham, and Cooper in turn endeavored to address the meeting, only to be howled down by members of the opposing parties. For an hour or more the audience amused itself in this fashion, the Shakespereans finally putting on handkerchief night-caps to indicate their determination to stay the night. The altercation on the platform was renewed spas-

<sup>51</sup> *Life*, p. 182. I find no account of this meeting in the *Star*, but a report of such a truce with the enemy is hardly to be expected in that quarter.

modically until ten o'clock, when Cooper borrowed a copy of the *Northern Star* and began to read it aloud, his words being echoed in stentorian tones by one of his followers who had also scaled the platform. The Sturgeites who had called the meeting gave in before a third of the article had been read, and worn out and exasperated left the hall with Vincent and Mr. Mursell. The presence of six policemen, who stood at the boundary between the 6d. reserved seats and the 1d. general admission places prevented more serious disorder. After escorting their General to his home the triumphant Shakespereans dispersed. Twenty panes of glass in the hall windows were broken by stones flung by the mob outside who were unable to get in.<sup>52</sup>

The wretchedness, misery, and starvation with which Cooper was surrounded at this time explain and, at least partially, excuse his frantic actions during these terrible years of suffering. One final example of his turbulence may be cited. So great was the destitution in Leicester that the new Union Poor House was crowded to excess, and throngs besieged the authorities for outdoor relief. A mill was finally set up at the workhouse, at which all who applied for relief were compelled to work for a few pence a day. This was considered degrading, and many of the more feeble declared that the working of the wheel was beyond their strength. Indignation meetings were held to protest against the harshness of the Poor Law guardians at which Cooper and other Chartists spoke. Finally an outbreak occurred, ending in a riot, during which the windows of the Poor House were broken. The violence was finally quelled by the police, and the ring-leaders were taken into custody. Their case was defended by Joseph Wood, "an attorney of low practice," who was a member of the Shakesperean Association. He came to

<sup>52</sup> *Northern Star*, July 30, 1842, of whose report the preceding paragraphs are a condensed account. Vincent returned to Leicester a few days later, and this time, owing to admission being by ticket only, he succeeded in addressing those who had gathered to hear him.

Cooper with a proposal which the latter confesses "too well accorded with my excited imagination and feelings." This was that he should become Wood's clerk by the drawing up of a signed agreement, whereupon the attorney would empower him to conduct the poor rioters' case before the magistrates. This was done, and for two whole days Cooper, to quote his own words "bullied and confounded the witnesses and angered the magistrates by his bold defense of the offenders."<sup>53</sup>

At last [Cooper concludes his account] the magistrates did what, if they had been possessed of the brains and courage of men, they would have done at first—put an end to my pleading by declaring that I was not a properly qualified representative of any attorney. By their foolish cowardice and incompetence the town of Leicester was in more danger of a real "riot" than it had ever been by our harmless singing of the "Lion of Freedom" through its streets. A troop of horse was sent for to Nottingham to overawe the working men; and the convicted rioters were sentenced and sent to gaol.<sup>54</sup>

As if determined to do everything possible to create prejudice against himself, on the evening of July 29th, when the Judges of the Assizes [one of whom had been on the bench when Frost was tried] made their entry into Leicester, he allowed bands of Shakespereans to go out to meet them and escort their carriages through the town to the accompaniment of shouts, jeers, and Chartist songs. The badgered "full-bottoms" were finally rescued at the castle doors by a bevy of constables, who rushed out and drove the rabble back.<sup>55</sup> This incident seems to have passed out of Cooper's recollection, but it was doubtless known to the judges before whom he was tried a few weeks later.

On July 25th Cooper paid another visit to Countess-thorpe, where he enrolled twenty-five new members in its recently formed association. On Sunday the 31st he preached in the morning at Sheepshead in the north of the

<sup>53</sup> *Life*, p. 184.

<sup>54</sup> *Life*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>55</sup> *Northern Star*, August 6, 1842.

county, and in the evening at a camp-meeting near Black-brook. The following day he returned to Leicester, and at a meeting of the Shakesperean Association presented a statement of accounts to the "Brigade," showing that in spite of their poverty they had expended locally during the month of July £8 4s 3d, and also made two donations to outside funds.<sup>56</sup> On August 2nd he departed for Nottingham to assist O'Connor and other Chartist in the effort to elect Joseph Sturge as M.P. for that city.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PLUG PLOT OF 1842

The election contest at Nottingham between John Walter and Joseph Sturge, which had been hanging fire since the previous May, was remarkable for two reasons: first, for the fact that Sturge, the advocate of peace and moral suasion, was supported by O'Connor who was usually regarded as the foremost advocate of physical force; and second, for the Quaker's declaration that he would dispense with banners, processions, personal canvass, and public house assistance.<sup>1</sup>

Walter was supported by the Tories and by Joseph Raynor Stephens, the militant crusader against the poor laws; Sturge by the Chartists, who were very numerous in Nottingham, and by some of the Whigs. The Chartist support included the personal appearance of O'Connor in Nottingham, together with half a dozen of his followers, viz., Mead, Sweet, West, Langmire, Morrison, M'Douall, and Cooper.<sup>2</sup>

Cooper has left a lively picture of the clash which occurred when Walter's adherents, the Nottingham "Lambs" [a notorious local strong-arm squad composed largely of butchers] met the embattled Chartists in the market-place a few days before the election, both sides having scheduled a meeting there at the same time. The trouble began with the Chartist jeering of Stephens, whose *Northern Star* portrait they tore up, and then flung the pieces in his face.

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<sup>1</sup> Rose, J. Holland *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> After the election O'Connor sent Sturge a bill for the services of these lecturers, who consented to be paid by the very man whom most of them had been holding up to their followers as an enemy of the Chartist cause, and whom O'Connor himself had insisted was "a cunning tool of the Anti-Corn Law League." [Vide Gamme, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 225.] In his autobiography Cooper names Vincent, Clark, and O'Neill as also present to support Sturge. These enemies of O'Connor are not mentioned in the *Northern Star*.

In retaliation the "Lambs" charged the Sturge platform. As they advanced the Quaker himself abandoned it, but O'Connor scorned to retreat.

Feargus waited until the Tory Lambs got nearer, and then throwing his hat into the wagon he cried out, "Now, my side charge!" and down he went among the crowd; and along with him went M'Douall and Tom Clark—and gallantly they fought and faced the Tory butchers \* \* \*. Once the Tory Lambs fought off all who had surrounded him [O'Connor], and got him down, and my heart quaked—for I thought they would kill him. But in a very few minutes his red head emerged from the rough human billows, and he was fighting his way as before \* \* \*. O'Connor and his party finally put the Tories to flight, and sprang upon the Tory wagon, when three lusty cheers were given; and after Feargus and M'Douall had addressed the crowd it dispersed.<sup>1</sup>

The defeated Tories preferred charges of assault against O'Connor, and sought to have his hearing set for ten o'clock on election day, but the magistrates refused to connive at such a piece of chicane. The Tories also posted the town with bills denouncing O'Connor as "an Irish bully backed by a band of hired ruffians" whose object was "the subjugation of your town by brute force to the intolerable tyranny of strangers."<sup>2</sup>

The night before the election an immense procession of Chartists paraded through the town, "Cooper with his stunning tenor leading the musicians," and wound up by calling Sturge out of bed to make a speech in his night shirt at two o'clock in the morning.<sup>3</sup>

Cooper states in the autobiography that O'Connor abandoned the field next day, having set off early for London. That this is a mistake seems evident from the *Star's* contemporary account of O'Connor's speeches and other activities in Nottingham on the day of the election, and of his appearance before the magistrates, when his case was dismissed, on the following day. Cooper claims that after O'Connor's retirement he was left with only a few lean and half-starved stockingers to look after Sturge's interests at

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Star*, August 6, 1842.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 160.

the opening of the poll, weaklings who were no match for the Tory Lambs who arrived at the polling place at six o'clock. He was convinced that Sturge might have won had the polling booths been guarded by his friends in the morning, for since the state of the poll was posted every hour timid voters held back until it was evident in which direction public opinion was running, and venal ones, of whom there were many at this election, were able to hold their ballots until they reached the highest value. There was no risk of overstaying the market on the present occasion, as Walter finally won by a plurality of only 84 votes. The *Star* attributed Sturge's defeat to Whig hostility and Tory gold. The forty-four publicans of Nottingham voted solidly against Sturge, not only because of his well-known temperance sentiments [he would not even sell grain to malt-makers] but also because of Tory threats to cancel licenses if the publicans did not support Walter. There were several "serious collisions between the Chartist and the soldiers in the town; hundreds of men were arrested, and in several instances offenders were sentenced to six months, four months, and two months with hard labour."<sup>6</sup>

When Walter was unseated shortly afterwards "for bribery,"<sup>7</sup> Sturge was offered the place but declined to accept it,<sup>8</sup> and another Complete Suffrage candidate was thereupon returned in his place.

<sup>6</sup> Begbie, H., *Life of General William Booth*, 1; 51. This biographer also quotes W. T. Stead as follows: Booth "was a boy of thirteen when Feargus O'Connor first visited Nottingham, but in all the thousands, the great Chartist orator had no more enthusiastic disciple than William Booth. He was a Chartist—a physical force Chartist, of course, being a boy, and therefore uncompromising \* \* \* 'The Chartist were for the poor,' so the boy reasoned, 'therefore I am for the Chartist.'"

<sup>7</sup> So Cooper [*Life*, p. 161]. But Rose [*Op. cit.*, 123] says Walter was unseated "by an election petition." The Dictionary of National Biography says vaguely that "he was unseated in 1842, his election being declared void on grounds unconnected with his personal action." [Does this mean bribery by Tories to which Walter personally was not a party?] Although the D.N.B. refers the reader in quest of further information to the obituary of Walter's son of the same name [*Times*, November 5, 1894] investigation of that source fails to throw any light upon the matter.

<sup>8</sup> West, J., *op. cit.*, p. 181.

After the election Cooper went back to Leicester, and on Sunday, August 7th, he addressed a large camp-meeting in south Leicestershire. At a Chartist picnic the following day he "contributed to the amusement" by a brief lecture on Lady Jane Grey, who was educated on this spot by Roger Ascham.<sup>9</sup> Returning to Leicester he was that night elected delegate to the Chartist Conference at Manchester. After delivering a final address to the Shakesperean Brigade [which now numbered between twenty-six and twenty-seven hundred] enjoining them to see that they numbered three thousand by the time he returned, he placed the Brigade in charge of Beedham and Duffy<sup>10</sup> during what he anticipated would be a brief absence, and on Tuesday, August 9, 1842, set off for the Chartist Convention.

Having some old accounts still uncollected in Birmingham, Bilston, Wolverhampton, Stafford and the Potteries for copies of the *Commonwealthsman* supplied to agents in these places<sup>11</sup> he resolved to combine politics and business by visiting the towns mentioned, and after endeavoring to collect the sorely-needed sums owed him, to preach the Charter in each.

Just before he set off there broke out one of those sporadic rebellions of labor which the intolerable condition of the people continually produced. It began at Staleybridge on August 4th with the walking out of twenty thousand weavers when an attempt was made to further reduce their wages.<sup>12</sup> Shortly afterward the whole Manchester district burst into flame.<sup>13</sup> Rapidly the movement spread, first to Scotland and the north of England, and then to the Potteries and the coal fields of South Staffordshire in the Midlands. In Lancashire it was referred to as the "Plug Plot," because the strikers made a practice of

<sup>9</sup> *Northern Star*, August 13, 1842.

<sup>10</sup> James Duffy was an excitable Irishman who had suffered a long imprisonment for Chartism. He had been highly successful as an agitator in the north of Leicestershire.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> *West. J.*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>13</sup> See Carlyle's *Past and Present* [Book III] for a contemporary comment upon the "Manchester Insurrection."

drawing out the boiler-plugs, thus making it impossible to supply power for the machinery.<sup>14</sup> Cooper believed that the Anti-Corn Law manufacturers had deliberately reduced wages in order to drive the people to desperation so that the resulting disturbances might paralyze the protectionist Government and bring about its overthrow.<sup>15</sup> Hovell quotes contemporary pamphlets and newspapers which show that this view of Cooper's was widely popular, but he believes that such a Machiavelian policy upon the part of the League is hardly credible, and that like the Chartists they merely made what capital they could out of the situation.<sup>16</sup>

As an effective protest the strike was doomed to failure from the first. The strikers had no funds and no organization, and they were fighting against employers who in many instances were glad to shut down for a time. But although ridiculous as a strike, the turn-out had moral dignity and effect as a national demonstration.<sup>17</sup> Although Cooper had heard of the strike before leaving Leicester he anticipated no danger or trouble as a result of his visit to the scene of action.

His first stop was at Birmingham, where he lectured at the commodious Socialist Hall of Science. It was at this time that he first met George White, a Birmingham stalwart who had become something of a celebrity among Chartists for his fearlessness and rough humor. Cooper spent the following day with White, and at night they held an outdoor Chartist meeting near the railway station in spite of a heavy rain.

The next day Cooper traveled to Wednesbury where he found thirty thousand colliers on strike for higher wages. At an enormous out of doors meeting Arthur

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> *Life* p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 260, Note 3. On August 14, 1842, John Bright wrote to Mrs. Priestman: "Peel almost charged the League with the insurrection, and Cobden replied that because he and the League had *foretold* it, they were charged with it! The cause was Peel and the Aristocracy and in their Corn Laws." Trevelyan, G. M., *Life of John Bright*, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Life of John Bright*, p. 79.

O'Neill and Joseph Linney [both later imprisoned with Cooper in Stafford Gaol] addressed the miners, counseling them "to persevere with their strike, and above all things to avoid breaking the law or acting disorderly." Cooper also spoke, and his remarks were received with the greatest enthusiasm. He encouraged the strikers "in their common resolution to have what they considered a fitting remuneration for their labour, or otherwise to desist from enabling their oppressors to maintain their tyrannous position by refusing to labour at all,"<sup>18</sup> and declared he would never forget that "vast assemblage of human eyes, all raised in expectant intelligence, brave bosoms thrown open to the autumn air, and stalwart arms and stout hands held up with instantaneous heartiness the very moment I put it to them whether they would all adopt the People's Charter."<sup>19</sup>

At the conclusion of the meeting he and Linney proceeded to Bilston,<sup>20</sup> where that night he again spoke to striking miners, concluding his two hour address as before with an impassioned plea for unity in the fight for the Charter.<sup>21</sup>

The next morning, Friday August 12th, he proceeded to Wolverhampton on foot. Here also he addressed a meeting of strikers; "the whole district," he writes, "having entirely ceased to labour, and nothing being more easy than to get an outdoor meeting of thousands upon thousands at this time of excitement \* \* \* The Wolverhampton colliers, like the assemblages I had previously addressed, held

<sup>18</sup> Cooper, Thomas, "A Brief Memoir of W. Sheratt Ellis, the Chartist Exile," the *English Chartist Circular and Temperance Advocate*, No. 145, vol. ii, p. 375 [Place Collection, British Museum, vol. 64.]

<sup>19</sup> Cooper's letter "To the Shakesperean Brigade of Leicester Chartist," *Northern Star*, August 20, 1842.

<sup>20</sup> Regarding this town of Bilston, it is instructive to find Lamb writing to Wordsworth in September 1816 with reference to the publication of a sermon of Coleridge's addressed to the working classes, and designed "to persuade them that they are not so distressed as commonly supposed"—"Methinks he should recite it to a congregation of Bilston Colliers—the fate of Cinna the Poet [who tradition reports was torn to pieces by a mob] would instantaneously be his." Lucas, E. V., *Life of Charles Lamb*, London, 1905 [two vols.] 1; 502.

<sup>21</sup> Cooper's letter "To the Shakesperean Brigade."

up their hands with one accord and instantly when I asked them if they would espouse the cause of the Charter.”<sup>22</sup>

In the afternoon of this same day he went on to Stafford. He found this town in a state bordering on panic, one hundred and fifty colliers under arrest, troops of soldiers marched in, and a rumor that cannon were to be placed upon the towers of the prison. It was this prison in which shortly afterwards he began his two year sentence. At this time it held fast John Mason, the Chartist missionary whose address had converted him to Chartism. No printer could be found to strike off handbills announcing Cooper’s meeting, and he was told that he would be arrested if he dared to stand up in the market-place that night. He refused to be intimidated, however, even when he found the superintendent of police at the meeting standing at his right elbow, and a number of red-coats among the audience. He evaded interference by couching his remarks in the form of satire, showing how excellent it was to have “a sweet little silver-voiced lady” on the throne, and to pay her a million and a quarter annually to support herself and her establishment. He demonstrated that the land would be ruined if the Civil List were not kept up, and “denounced any ragged shoemaker who dared to talk about his grandmother being in a bastille and vegetating on skilly while the Dowager had three palaces to live in.” When some of the soldiers began to create a disturbance, Cooper proposed to the crowd that they adjourn to Freeman’s Common, which was done. There he again addressed them, and then led them back to town in procession singing “Spread the Charter.” Before dispersing the Chartists gave three cheers for Mason close under his cell window.<sup>23</sup>

Having an engagement to lecture to the Chartists of Hanley, largest of the Five Towns, Cooper next proceeded

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Letter “To the Shakesperean Brigade.” “Mason and several others were imprisoned for attending what the stupid magistrates designated an illegal meeting, though held some time before the excitement connected with the strike commenced.”—Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 244.

to that place by omnibus from the Whitmore station, and arriving on Sunday afternoon found everything peaceful, and no signs of the strike prevailing there. During the afternoon he preached political sermons at Fenton and also at Lanebud. That evening he spoke in Hanley for the first time, preaching from the text "Thou shalt do no murder" to a great crowd which had assembled upon a vacant piece of ground before the Crown Inn. Speaking with passionate earnestness and fiery indignation upon the wrongs of the people throughout history, he showed how in all ages kings had spilt the blood of their humble subjects in wars of conquest. After pointing out that the taxes levied to maintain the Napoleonic wars had entailed immense suffering upon the toiling millions he proceeded to a denunciation of the grasping landlords and grinding mine owners of his own day. Finally, in a voice like the peal of a trumpet, he declared that all who were instrumental in maintaining the existing iniquitous order of things were guilty of violating the command "Thou shalt do no murder." In closing he warned his hearers against their breaking the commandment, and attempted to allay the feelings of vengeance and anger he had only too successfully aroused.<sup>24</sup> Upon the invitation of some of the striking miners he agreed to speak again next morning at eight o'clock.

When he dropped in at the Chartist headquarters at the George and Dragon [across the street from his lodging with Jeremiah Yates] he was told that they had just received instructions to bring on as wide an extension of the strike as possible, at the same time persuading the strikers to declare they would stay out until the Charter became the law of the land. Resolutions to this effect had been adopted at Manchester three days earlier, and it was intended that the movement should spread all over England. Cooper who had previously advocated such a course of action at Bilston and Wednesbury declared his willingness

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed summary of this political sermon see *Life*, pp. 187-190.

to submit such a resolution to the mass meeting which he was to address next morning.

To the brief autobiographical account of the serious rioting which followed that meeting it is now possible to add details from contemporary journals, legal papers, and memoranda made by Cooper at the time.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> These memoranda and legal documents and letters [which are referred to in this study as the Ash MSS] were left at Cooper's death in the hands of his faithful servants Mr. and Mrs. Ash, who turned them over to me. I have now deposited them in the library of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Chapel in Lincoln.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE POTTERY RIOTS

For the mass meeting at eight o'clock on Monday morning, held on the vacant lot known as the Crown Bank, several thousand strikers turned out. After explaining to them in his opening speech that the men of Lancaster had determined to strike for the Charter as well as for an increase in wages Cooper suggested that the men of the Five Towns do the same. John Richards, a sturdy old man well known in the Potteries, who in spite of his seventy years had some time before this toured the whole district on foot as a Chartist missionary next addressed the meeting. He concluded by proposing a resolution which Cooper proceeded to place before the meeting. When one of the audience challenged his right to do this Cooper announced that he was acting as self-appointed chairman, so that the responsibility for the actions of the meeting would be his alone. After the passage of the Richards resolution [which in the autobiography Cooper confuses with the one which followed it] a collier named George Hemmings proposed the following resolution:

Come all ye that are weary and heavy laden and we will give you rest. We hereby agree to stand by the resolution passed at the Manchester meeting; that is to stand and cease work until the Charter becomes the law of the land;<sup>1</sup>

which was passed "by acclamation." Cooper then again addressed the meeting. In this speech he referred to the weakness of the Whig government; denounced the Opium War in China; and stated that if one tenth of the population were to come out on a given day and insist upon the Charter they would certainly obtain it. There need be no fear of interference from the soldiery, as the Government

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<sup>1</sup> *Affidavit of Josiah Mills, Ash MSS.*

had sent so many troops to India and China that there was left only an average of ten soldiers for each town. If all the workers would cease to labor until the Charter became the law Parliament would be compelled to pass that measure.<sup>2</sup>

Three witnesses substantially agreed that he had made these statements. Commenting upon their testimony Cooper wrote:

I did not mean the calling out of the population in a shew of force. I have always contended that it is by a peaceable spread of our opinions that the Charter is to be obtained \* \* \* Nor was the point about the ten soldiers put to the audience as an encouragement for them to attempt physical force.<sup>3</sup>

One of the counts of the later indictment against Cooper charged that he had said to the assembled people:

The Charter is the only thing that can assure you permanently a fair day's wage \* \* \* It is a very comfortable thing that you have the fields full of food fit for the sustenance of man. You may perhaps ask how you are to live during this time. Why, how do they live elsewhere? They do live—perhaps not very well, but yet almost as well as many of you who are at work. You must not forget you have the fields full of food fit for the use of man. I do not say I should steal it myself, and therefore cannot recommend you to do what I would not be prepared to do also—but there it is, and this is a world in which men should not starve.<sup>4</sup>

That this is a garbled version of what Cooper actually said is sufficiently evident, but it is as near to the truth as most indictments are against those who have felt that the needs of humanity should be placed above the rights of property.

Either Cooper concluded his speech with the suggestion that all the workers of the town should be turned out,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cooper's holograph memorandum regarding the testimony against him—*Ash MSS.*

<sup>4</sup> Copy of the indictment—*Ash MSS.* Kingsley, who reproduced many incidents of Cooper's history in *Alton Locke*, similarly has his hero precipitate the riot which results in his imprisonment by crying out at the close of his address: "Go and get bread! \* \* \* There are rights above all laws, and the right to live is one." *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* [1850] chap. xxviii.

or some one who followed him made such a suggestion. At any rate forty or fifty of his audience went directly to the Earl of Granville's colliers and stopped three of the engines there, and then, nearer the town, stopped a fourth. According to the *North Staffordshire Mercury* "they raked out the fires, let water into the boilers, and flooded the pits to stop work."

Although it is evident from his own testimony as well as from that of the witnesses against him that Cooper's Monday morning speech was of a highly inflammable nature, he had honestly not anticipated any such acts of violence as immediately followed it. On this point he remarked in the memoir of Ellis which he wrote a few months after these events:

Having witnessed the peaceable manner in which the strike for wages was carried on by immense masses of men in Wednesbury, Bilston, and Wolverhampton, I had not the slightest conception that any approach to violence would characterize the strike of the Pottery men for the Charter. In this, however, I was deceived.<sup>5</sup>

Overlooking completely the effect of his own exciting addresses in which he had denounced the employing class and prophesied miraculous improvements if the Charter were obtained, he then naively concludes:

The agents of the Anti-Corn Law League were in the crowd which I addressed on the Crown Bank at Hanley, and, most diabolically, inflamed the passions of the multitude during the day.<sup>6</sup>

The reporter of the *North Staffordshire Mercury*, Richard Greatlatch, deposed that he had followed the mob [which he estimated at "two hundred men and boys"] about all day, and that "they were very riotous." According to the *Mercury* account, which Greatlatch presumably wrote, the rioting began at Hanley, with the mob charging up the street shouting, "To the lock up; release the prisoners!" At the station-house they quickly freed the half-dozen inmates of the cells and then pro-

<sup>5</sup> "Memoir of W. Sheratt Ellis," loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

ceeded to tear up the records, break the furniture, and smash the windows. Continuing on to Shelton the mob performed the same operations at the office of Mr. Gibbs, the Poor Rate Collector, and then proceeding down High street they wrecked the office of the Court of Requests and gutted the house of its caretaker. The rabble next proceeded by way of Shelton bridge to the Stoke police station, where they set the furniture on fire. The chief-of-police, who lived in the building managed to escape, leaving his wife behind. One of the rioters, who had found a cleaver, cut off a cat's head and threatened to do the same for her, but she managed to get away from an upstairs room. Another policeman escaped with a broken arm, and an unidentified man was struck down by a cutlass. The mob next pressed up the turnpike road to Great Fenton, where they pillaged the house of Thomas Allin, Esq., burned family papers, broke furniture, and went off with a brace of pistols and a sword.

A handful of soldiers from the 12th Infantry, headed by the magistrates T. B. Rose and W. Parker<sup>7</sup> met a party of the rioters, who instantly fled. This small military force then moved on to Stoke, where the house of Mr. Rose was believed to be in danger. That of Mr. Parker was attacked that night and burned to the ground. The withdrawal of the soldiers left the mob, said to number not more than two hundred at this time, at liberty in Longton, where they proceeded to wreck the Union Market Hall, the police station, and the town hall. The worst destruction occurred at the house of the Reverend Dr. Vale, in Trentham road. Some of the rioters broke into the cellar, where they found wine, which many of them drank until they were intoxicated, and in that state set fire to

<sup>7</sup> Cooper saw them pass while walking uneasily about in the streets near his lodgings. He described them as "a company of infantry marching with fixed bayonets, and two magistrates on horseback accompanying their officers." He also saw "the shop keepers shutting all their shops up, and putting their day-books and ledgers into their gigs and driving off." Soon Hanley had "become a human desert. Scarcely a person could be seen in the streets, all the works were closed, and the shops shut." *Life* p. 192 and p. 193.

the house, which was practically burned down. Several of those who had visited the wine cellar were too drunk to be able to escape upon the tardy arrival of the military, who arrested nineteen of them. During the afternoon another mob destroyed the house of Charles Mason, Esq., at Great Fenton. When the soldiers appeared the pillagers fled to Fenton, and there finished burning and gutting the police station.

The desperate ragged working men who had started in to turn out the labor of the town had unexpectedly developed into a band of reckless vengeful marauders. The ordinary manifestations of crowd psychology can account, however, for everything that happened, although to Cooper the only explanation possible was that honest workers had been wickedly misled by agents of his enemies.

When Cooper returned to his lodgings at Jeremiah Yates after the conclusion of the morning meeting he found that an old Lincoln acquaintance, Mr. Preston Barker, who had removed to Hanley and become proprietor of the Royal Oak, had sent to invite him to dinner. At the Royal Oak he found also present his former instructor in languages, the Italian D'Albrione, now settled in the Potteries, and old Daddy Richards. It was in talk with the latter that Cooper first heard of the turning out of the factory hands and colliers, a proceeding of which he expressed approval. He did not learn of the riots until after he had returned to the house of Mr. Yates later in the afternoon. This news, he told the magistrates, he heard with sorrow:

because I was not only aware that much human suffering must be occasioned by such proceedings, but I feared that what I considered to be the best of causes—the cause of human freedom would be retarded thereby. I would have gone away that afternoon, but I had a small settlement of 17s. 6d. to receive from Mr. Yates, and [as] I had not much money in my pocket, I was afraid I would be short of my expenses to Manchester and other places. I therefore stayed, and as it had been given out in the morning I went to the [Chartist headquarters at the] George and Dragon, about six o'clock.

But it was proposed that we adjourn to the Crown Bank, and I accordingly led the way there, singing "Spread the Charter through

the land." A very large meeting was soon assembled on the Crown Bank and the streets surrounding. I should think there were twenty thousand people.<sup>8</sup>

In his address Cooper warned the strikers against destroying property, and reprimanded severely those who had gotten drunk, saying that they would ruin their cause. He exhorted them to abide by the resolution they had passed that morning, as the strike for the Charter, if it succeeded, would confer the greatest of blessings upon them and their children. A delegate to the Manchester conference was then elected, after which the meeting was concluded.

If Cooper hoped by this address to stem further lawlessness he was doomed to disappointment, for further rioting broke out as soon as it became dark. The first place to be attacked was the house of the agent of Lord Granville, owner of the mines. The infuriated colliers succeeded in setting the place on fire, but the flames did not take hold readily, and were finally extinguished by faithful servants when the attackers fled owing to the rumor that there was danger of a gunpowder explosion.

Albion House, the residence in Shelton of one of the magistrates, William Parker, who had accompanied the soldiery in the morning, was next attacked. The family managed to escape before the mob broke in, but the house was burned to the ground, Mr. Wedgwood's fire-engine which was sent to fight the flames, being turned back by the mob.

At about two in the morning the incendiaries proceeded to Hanley parsonage. Dr. Aitkens, unwilling to believe that his home would be molested, stayed on the premises until safety compelled a retreat. The howling mob, which kept outside the gates until a few of the hardier ruffians had entered first, then rushed in, ripped open the feather beds on the lawns, carried off everything movable, raided the cellar for liquor, and finally set fire to the house, which burned until only the bare walls remained.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper's statement before the magistrates—*Ast. Mss. Cl. Life*, pp. 192-195.

Not a magistrate was in Hanley, that town being left to the mercy of the mob, which the *Mercury* reported "went about stealing, asking for money, demanding drink, breaking into houses \* \* \* as well as burning all night. Had there been a magistrate in town to rally the people it is probable the mischief would have been checked at first."<sup>9</sup>

At the close of the evening meeting Cooper went to the George and Dragon where he was closeted with the Chartist leaders in a discussion of the events of the day and of what should be done at the Manchester meeting. He took the opportunity at this time to write to the committee in charge of the Shakesperean Brigade, urging them to get the Chartists of Leicester together to pass there also the resolution to work no more until the Charter became the law of the land. Unwilling to trust such a letter to the post,<sup>10</sup> he despatched it, together with a letter to his wife, by a Hanley Chartist, who walked to Leicester and delivered both communications next day.

As the evening wore on there were anxious discussions as to the aftermath of the rioting, which was still proceeding. Cooper knew from the past experience of others that he would undoubtedly be apprehended as the instigator and abettor of the uprising. To prevent this, Bevington, the strongest-minded of the Chartist leaders present, advised him to get off to Manchester at once, and two men were sent out to search for some conveyance to take him to Whitmore station, some little distance away. They tried at several places to obtain a gig, but without success, and returned at eleven o'clock with a report that it was rumored soldiers, policemen, and special constables had already thrown a cordon around the Potteries. About midnight word was received that it would be possible to get a conveyance at Stoke. Cooper thereupon, with Be-

<sup>9</sup> *North Staffordshire Mercury*, August 20, 1842.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper's fears were well founded. In 1844 T. S. Duncombe proved in the house that Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary, had frequently had the private correspondence of Mazzini opened and read.

vington and some of the other Chartist, set off for the house of Tom Mayer in Upper Hanley, nearer to the spot where the expected vehicle was to pass, Cooper being partially disguised in a drab top coat, with a hat in place of the traveling cap which he had worn for many years. But shortly after midnight word was received that the conveyance from Stoke could not be had.

It was accordingly suggested that the best plan now would be for Cooper to walk on to Macclesfield, where he could catch the Manchester coach at seven o'clock next morning. As he did not know the way, and was burdened with a traveling cloak and bag, two pottery workers, James Green and Joseph Moore, offered to carry his things and show him the way. Cooper promised them half a crown each for their assistance, and after bidding Bevington and the others farewell the trio set off at about half past twelve for Macclesfield. Their journey out of town was by way of back streets, which were dark and deserted at this time of night, and Cooper saw no signs of the fires or of the rioters, although during that night three houses were set on fire.

Bevington had warned Cooper's companions to avoid Burslem, as that town was reported to be filled with special constables, who were arresting all who entered, and directed them to go by way of Chell, a small village nearby. About a mile out of Upper Hanley a cross road was reached. Here the two young men fell into a violent disagreement as to which was the proper road to Chell, one insisting that the left turn led to Burslem, and the other that it led to Chell. As they were unable to agree, Cooper finally decided the matter by taking the road leading to the left. Moore's protest that it led to Burslem was soon found to be correct, but Cooper refused to turn back, as this was the highroad to Macclesfield, and he thought the rumor about the constables might be unfounded.

But Bevington's warning had been based on sound information. As the three men came into the market-

place at Burslem at "about 1/2 to 2"<sup>11</sup> they observed a force of special constables drawn up under the lamplight. Panic-stricken, Moore and Green attempted to hurry away, but Cooper kept his presence of mind, and called to them in a strong whisper not to walk fast, for he knew this would be a sure way of arousing the suspicions of the watchers.

He spoke too late. The leaders of the group, Alcock and Wood by name, both manufacturers of Burslem, were already approaching. Wood demanded their business in being abroad at that time of night, and where they were going.

Cooper replied that he was on his way to Macclesfield to catch the early coach for Manchester, and that his companions were acting as guides. In reply to further questioning he admitted that he had come from Hanley. Alcock, who had stopped Moore and Green, demanded of them the name of their companion. Unwilling to bring Cooper into trouble, they declared they did not know his name, and persisted in their statement in spite of repeated questionings. Unable to obtain any information, the two manufacturers ordered the three travelers to accompany them for further questioning to the principal inn of the town, called the "Legs of Man" after the well-known Manx arms. Here they were interrogated by a tart-looking, consequential man, who demanded of Cooper what his occupation was. To this the latter replied that he was a commercial traveler—a statement which he felt was at least partially true. After several other queries the ill-tempered individual asked, "What is your name?" "Thomas Cooper," was the bold reply. Mr. Alcock recognized at once whom they were dealing with, and hastily passed a slip of paper to his fellow-officer. As it passed the candle Cooper observed that the writing was, "He is a Chartist lecturer." Seeing that he was recognized Cooper instantly declared, "Yes, gentlemen, I am a Chartist lecturer, and now I will answer any question you may put to me." "Well, sir,"

<sup>11</sup> *Ash MSS.*

said Mr. Wood, "now that we know who you are we must take you before a magistrate. We shall have to rouse him from bed; but it must be done."<sup>12</sup>

By a fortunate circumstance the magistrate before whom Cooper was now carried was no other than the same Mr. Parker whose house was even then smoldering in Shelton. Alarmed by the appearance of the mob he had escaped from his residence and from the town, and had reached Burslem only an hour before the arrested Chartists. Sitting up in bed with his nightcap on, his nerves shaken by his experience earlier in the evening, it is not surprising that his questions impressed Cooper as "most stupid." He requested that the carpet-bag, which Cooper had taken over from his companions be emptied in his presence, but was unable to find anything incriminating in its few meager personal effects, or even in the letters and papers which it also contained.

Mr. Wood at last suggested that as there was no charge against the captive, nor any witnesses, and as he frankly admitted his identity and his speaking at Hanley, it would be best to let him continue his journey. Mr. Parker acquiesced, and Cooper was thereupon discharged.

He found his companions staunchly awaiting him in the street, and once more taking his bag and cloak they hurried with him towards Macclesfield. It was then after three o'clock. Cooper allowed the others to go on a little away ahead while he struggled with his conflicting and tumultuous feelings.

"Was it not sneaking cowardice to quit the scene of danger?" I asked myself. "Ought I not to have remained, and again, on the following morning have summoned the people to hear me, and proclaimed 'Peace, Law, and Order'?"

"Or, what if like scenes should be transacting in Lancashire, and elsewhere, and this be really an incipient revolution—ought I not to have remained, and displayed the spirit of a leader, instead of shunning the danger?"

"No, it was better to go on to the Manchester convention, and learn the truth about Lancashire, and know the spirit of the leaders

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<sup>12</sup> *Life*, p. 202.

with whom I had to act. O'Connor would be there; and surely he would not be deficient in courage if he saw any real opportunity of leading the people to win a victory for the People's Charter."<sup>12</sup>

Thus inwardly communing Cooper lost all thought of time, until, near a well-known public house, the Red Bull, about half way between Burslem and Macclesfield, one of the young men looked at his watch and declared that it was now impossible for them to reach their destination until after the early coach had left. This the other confirmed, and they both advised that Cooper turn off a short distance beyond to the road for Crewe, where it would be possible for him to catch a train for Manchester. This was obviously the only feasible plan for reaching the convention that day, and was accordingly carried out, although the guides lost their way twice before finally arriving at their destination. At Crewe they all had breakfast together, after which Cooper bade his two young companions good-bye, gave them their promised half-crowns, and boarded the train.

He felt afterwards that his not continuing on to Macclesfield was an intervention of Providence on his behalf, for had he done so he would certainly have encountered the mob of working men who were proceeding to the Potteries from Leek and Congleton, one of a score of similar bands roaming the north of England during this tumultuous August. Had he met this crowd of strikers, he would certainly have gone back with them, so wrought up were his feelings. In that case he might perhaps have been shot in the streets as the leader of the uprising, for on the morning that he left the town Burslem was the scene of a struggle between the troops and the strikers resulting finally in a pitched battle. During the early hours of the morning thousands of men and boys carrying bludgeons appeared from the surrounding districts and poured into the Pottery towns. To oppose them a certain Captain Powys, who had just arrived in Burslem, ordered out a troop of dragoons and special constables under Major Trench. With

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<sup>12</sup> *Life*, p. 205.

this small force he proceeded to the town square, being assailed on the way with showers of stones. Here after the riot act had been read Captain Powys ordered the mob to return to their homes. Instead, at nine-thirty a still greater crowd appeared, and again assailed the soldiers and police with stones. Once more Captain Powys commanded that they desist from violence and when his words had no effect, "believing that the safety of the inhabitants of the town demanded it, he requested Major Trench<sup>14</sup> to command the troops to fire,"<sup>15</sup> which they did. Immediately the mob, said to number five or six thousand, rushed away in all directions. A part of them rallied, and turned on the special constables, but were quickly dispersed. One unfortunate victim, his "brains blown out \*\*\* fell on the steps of the house of Wedgwood, Esq., in a pool of blood."<sup>16</sup> Many others were badly wounded. They were given medical aid by the soldiery and removed to the infirmary. Orders were then given to clear the town, which was easily done, the strikers being terror-stricken, and making no second attempt to rally. The special constables were increased in number, and London inspectors and police sergeants sent for, to lead them. In Hanley and Shelton all shops were closed from Monday until Wednesday. On Friday, fifty-four alleged rioters, amongst them several "decent-looking women", were arrested and sent as prisoners to Newcastle under an escort of cavalry. The total property damage resulting from the riots was estimated to be £12,000, not including money extorted from individuals.

Needless to say, such consequences as these had never entered Cooper's mind when he so earnestly exhorted the colliers and potters and factory hands to work no more until the Charter became the law of the land. "Now

<sup>14</sup> Cooper states: "A troop of cavalry, under Major Beresford, entered the district, and the daring colliers strove to unhorse the soldiers. Their commander reluctantly gave the order to fire; one man was killed at Burslem." There is no mention of Major Beresford in the contemporary newspaper account.

<sup>15</sup> *North Staffordshire Mercury*, August 27, 1842.

<sup>16</sup> *North Staffordshire Mercury*, August 27, 1842.

thirty years have gone over my head," he wrote in his autobiography, "I see how rash and uncalculating my conduct was \* \* \*. But \* \* \* the demagogue is ever the instrument rather than the leader of the mob. I had caught the spirit of the oppressed and discontented thousands, and, by virtue of my nature and constitution struck the spark which kindled all into combustion."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Life*, p. 197. In the opening stanzas of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, Cooper later gave a poetical version of his morning's speech and its consequences.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MANCHESTER CONFERENCE COOPER'S ARREST AND FIRST TRIAL

When he boarded the train at Crewe, Cooper knew nothing of the seriousness of the conflagration which he had left raging behind him. His thoughts were with the Chartist Conference at Manchester, to which he was proceeding as the delegate of the Leicester Shakesperean Association and he resolved that at the conference he would declare strongly in favor of a universal strike. In spite of his having repeatedly proclaimed "peace, law, and order" during his Hanley speeches, he now meant to fight "if the people had to fight," and endeavor to end the wrong at once, "if it could be ended."<sup>1</sup>

On the train Cooper found several acquaintances who were likewise bound for the Chartist conference, among them John Campbell, the National Secretary. When the tall chimneys of Manchester finally came into sight and every one was seen to be smokeless, Campbell turned to Cooper and said with an oath, "Not a single mill at work! Something must come out of this, and something serious too."<sup>2</sup>

Conditions in Manchester seemed to support the prophecy. Detachments of cavalry filled the principal streets, and a unit of field artillery rattled over the cobblestones.<sup>3</sup> When Cooper saw them his naturally fiery

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Hovell states that there were 2000 troops and six pieces of artillery in Manchester at this time; yet, remembering Peterloo, the Government avoided an appeal to force, and there was no serious clash between the soldiers and the workers on this occasion." [Op. cit., p. 262.] Carlyle commented: "That the Manchester Insurrection stood still on the streets, with an indisposition to fire and blood was wisdom for it even as an insurrection." Referring to the moral effect of the "turn-out" he continues; "And this was what these poor Manchester operatives \* \* \* did manage to perform.

temper, which had been fanned to white heat by the events of the past few days, became more fixed in its belief that force should be met with force.

He was present at the first meeting of the Conference, held that afternoon at a public house. If he had had any sleep since his speeches in Burslem and his flight during the night it could have been only for an hour or so after he reached Manchester. O'Connor objected to a public-house as the meeting-place, and suggested that they adjourn to the chapel of the Reverend Mr. Schofield, where it was agreed that the formal sessions of the delegates should begin next morning. At this first official gathering on Wednesday, August 17th, nearly sixty delegates were present, one of them being a youth of eighteen to "represent the juvenile population."<sup>4</sup>

After electing a president, each delegate reported in turn upon the state of affairs in his district. The sentiment appeared unanimous for keeping the strikers out until the Charter was granted, most of those present believing that the time had at last come when they might hope to paralyze the government. Bairstow finally presented a formal resolution on behalf of the Executive to the same effect as had previously been passed at many local meetings; namely, that all labour should cease until the Charter had become the law of the land. Cooper, who had obtained the passage of this resolution at the various meetings which he had addressed, was a strong supporter of the motion. After the Executive and some others had spoken, he rose in his place and delivered a fiery harangue, which he has thus summarized:

I told the Conference that I should vote for the resolution because it meant fighting, and I saw it must come to that. The spread

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They put their huge inarticulate question, *What do you mean to do with us?* in a manner audible to every reflective soul in this kingdom; exciting deep pity in all good men, deep anxiety in all men whatever." *Past and Present Book i, chap. iii.*

<sup>4</sup> *Trial of Feargus O'Connor and 58 Others at Lancaster on a Charge of Sedition, Conspiracy, Tumult, and Riot, 1846*, p. 153. This 446 page publication contains a complete transcript of the testimony given at this joint trial of all the delegates who attended this Manchester meeting.

of the strike would and must be followed by a general outbreak. The authorities of the land would try to quell it, but we must resist them. There was nothing now but a physical force struggle to be looked for. We must get the people out to fight; and they must be irresistible if they were united.<sup>5</sup>

But O'Connor, whom up to this time Cooper had regarded as an oracle, was not ready for such extreme action. A master of diplomacy, he began his reply with that species of compliment which the Irish call "blarney."

"I do not believe," said he, "that there is a braver man in the Conference than Mr. Cooper; and I have no doubt that he would do what he proposes others should do. But we are not here to talk about fighting. We must have no mention of anything of the kind here. We are met to consider what can be done to make the Charter the law of the land; and the general extension of the strike which has been begun is proposed as the means to be used. Let us keep to the resolution before the meeting."<sup>6</sup>

Four or five delegates who followed O'Connor repudiated this counsel, and strongly supported Cooper; but William Hill, editor of the *Northern Star* as strongly supported his chief in objecting to an appeal to force. Cooper thus summarizes his speech:

He admired, he said, the clear intelligence which had led me to proclaim in so decided a manner that the strike meant fighting; but he wondered that so clear an intellect should dream of fighting. Fighting!—the people had nothing to fight with, and would be mown down by artillery if they attempted to fight. The strike had originated with the Anti-Corn Law League, and we should simply be their tools if we helped to extend or prolong the strike. It could only spread disaster and suffering. He denounced the strike as a great folly and a mistake; and he moved a resolution that the Conference entirely disapprove of it.<sup>7</sup>

Hill was supported by Richard Otley, of Sheffield, who professed himself astonished to hear his friend Cooper talk of fighting.

How could I expect poor starving weavers to fight? and what had they to fight with? Had I calculated that if we endeavored

<sup>5</sup> *Life*, p. 208; cf. *Trial of Feargus O'Connor and 58 Others*, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> *Life*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 209-210.

to form battalions for fighting, the people would need food and clothing—they would need arms and powder and shot; they would very likely have to bivouac in the fields anyhow; could I expect poor weavers to do that? It would kill them in a few days.<sup>8</sup>

To the surprise of the delegates, Hill and O'Connor received further support from George Julian Harney, usually reckoned the most extreme physical-force man amongst the Chartist leaders. Yet Cooper testifies to the sincerity and sensible nature of this unexpected speech from "Julian, the renowned invoker of Marat, Danton, and Robespierre in the old Convention times."<sup>9</sup>

Hill's attack upon the general strike found few supporters, the votes in favor of his amendment totalling but six. O'Connor, as usual, went with the majority, and voted in favor of the strike, though he meant from the first to do nothing to support it. M'Douall, not satisfied with merely passing a resolution, drew up a fiercely-worded address to the strikers, "appealing to the God of battles for the issue, and urging a universal strike."<sup>10</sup> This was immediately printed and circulated upon the responsibility of the Executive, O'Connor refusing to allow the conference or himself to be mixed up with it. A few days later he published a violent attack upon M'Douall for his recklessness. And, indeed, the publication of the address caused the police to set up a search for its signatories.

Cooper and Bairstow left Manchester together, walking through Derbyshire as far as Belper, where they took a train. Upon arriving in Leicester Cooper found his Chartist followers in a state of discouragement and terror. There had been violent scenes in this town as well as in the Potteries. Even before the arrival of Cooper's letter urging a general strike for the Charter the working men of Leicester had "turned out." One of their assemblages upon a piece of rising ground known as Momecker Hill was charged and dispersed by the county police, who later charged the workers again in the streets of Leicester,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> *Life*, p. 211.

breaking a good many heads with their wooden truncheons.<sup>11</sup> Cooper's first task was to reorganize the shattered ranks of his Shakesperean Brigade, a matter of some difficulty as the operatives were thoroughly cowed by the rough tactics of the police. Cooper himself acted with his usual courage, issuing a printed address to the magistrates of Leicester which boldly reprehended them for dispersing the people, and assured them that he would continue to agitate for the People's Charter.<sup>12</sup>

But his course was now almost run. A summons was issued for his arrest on August 25, 1842, by a Staffordshire magistrate, commanding the "Constables of Stoke-upon-Trent and Peace Officers in the said county of Stafford" to forthwith apprehend and bring before me, [R. Adderley], or some other of her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the said County, the body of the said Thomas Cooper, to answer unto the said charge [of sedition], and to be further dealt with according to law. Herein fail ye not.<sup>13</sup>

Two of the members of the Stafford police brought the warrant to Leicester, and Sergeant Wright and Policeman Smith were sent to Cooper's house in Churchgate to execute it.<sup>14</sup> Cooper was expecting his apprehension, and accepted arrest quietly. In a letter to Hill written three days later from Stafford Gaol he stated that the constables had been civil, and that his beloved little wife parted from him like a heroine.<sup>15</sup> A crowd gathered in front of the shop, but made no trouble. As he was conducted along the street handcuffed to one of the policemen he repeated that the Chartist had a good cause. The constables took him to the Town-hall, where in the presence of the Mayor he was handed over to George Rhodes, Superintendent of the Hanley police, and Mr. Cottrell, Superintendent of the Newcastle-under-Lyme police.

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<sup>11</sup> Vide *Northern Star*, August 27, 1842, for an account of the troubles at Leicester.

<sup>12</sup> *Life*, p. 212.

<sup>13</sup> Copy of the original Summons—*Ash MSS.*

<sup>14</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, August 27, 1842.

<sup>15</sup> *Northern Star*, September 3, 1842.

He was removed to the railway about half past one in the custody of the Staffordshire officers, in an omnibus, a guard of police accompanying it; a large number of his beloved brigade of Shakesperean Chartists who had heard of what was going on—men, boys, and girls, the great part of whom were very active in the late disturbances—also followed as closely as they could; the women were very angry, and decidedly the most noisy of the lot.<sup>16</sup>

For a time it was feared that a rescue might be attempted, the Chartists being numerous in Leicester, and the prisoner exceedingly popular with them. He is a person of varied attainments and considerable talent.<sup>17</sup>

When the officers and their prisoner left by the “thirty minutes to two down-train,” devoted Shakespereans crowded the bridge above the railway station to wave farewell to their unfortunate General.

Cooper declared that “the two officers who had me in charge were kind to me to a degree which will cause me to respect them while I have breath. They constantly said, ‘You conduct yourself like a gentleman, and it is not our place to injure you.’”<sup>18</sup> Alighting from the train at Derby, the party proceeded “in a kind of double-gig,” stopping at Uttoexeter to take tea—an inherent British right not to be denied even to a political prisoner.

They arrived in Hanley about ten at night, and after being allowed a cup of coffee at an inn, Cooper was taken to one of the lock-ups which had escaped destruction by the rioters and placed in charge of the keeper, who “put huge iron bolts on [his] ankles,”<sup>19</sup> and left him to try to sleep on a bench, wrapped up in his cloak. Daylight brought Cottrell in whose charge he was to travel to Newcastle-under-Lyme, who immediately ordered the fetters removed. The wife of Jeremiah Yates, at whose house he had stayed on his memorable former visit to the town, brought him some breakfast and the *Northern Star*, and

<sup>16</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, August 27, 1842.

<sup>17</sup> *North Staffordshire Mercury*, August 27, 1842.

<sup>18</sup> *Northern Star*, September 3, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 212.

he was allowed to wash and change his clothes. On Saturday, August 27th, he states in his first letter to Hill:

At twelve at noon I was once more handcuffed, this time to another poor culprit—a rebel, I suppose, like myself—placed again in the double gig or car, and conveyed from Hanley to Newcastle-under-Lyme in the style of a state prisoner, guarded by sixteen of the 34th regiment of Foot, with fixed bayonets. As we went slowly everybody was edified with the sight of the rebel Chartist.<sup>20</sup>

Arrived at Newcastle-under-Lyme, he was arraigned before Rowland Mainwaring and John Ayshford Wise.<sup>21</sup> It was at this time that the affidavits previously quoted were taken down. In his letter to Hill, Cooper speaks more kindly of Mainwaring than he did afterwards when writing his autobiography, but in view of the two years confinement intervening between the two accounts this is easily understood.

Cooper complains of the leading questions which were put to the witnesses by the magistrates. Referring to the testimony of James Wilding [known in the Potteries as "Dirty Neck"], Cooper states that when Wilding testified he had heard the prisoner proclaim, "Peace, law, and order," and shout it aloud, Mr. Mainwaring interposed, and asked how it had been said, whether it sounded as if the speaker meant it. Wilding replied, "Oh, no! it was only an innuendo." Cooper asked then whether he was to be convicted of a crime by innuendo. "Do you think it right, sir," he concluded, "to put answers in men's mouths in this way?" <sup>22</sup>

Two witnesses, Thomas Boomhall, a Shelton laborer who was unable to write his name, and James Brundred, a blacksmith of the same place, both swore to Cooper's presence at the fires. The first testified to meeting Cooper walking towards Mr. Forrester's premises, and said he had known him by his cap. The second testified to seeing Cooper coming away from the fire at Mr. Parker's house.

<sup>20</sup> *Northern Star*, September 3, 1842.

<sup>21</sup> Spelled "Wyse" in the *Life*; but in the affidavits the spelling is as here given.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 213 Cf. Wilding's affidavit, *Ash MSS.*

As we have seen, Cooper was at that time on his way to Burslem, and shortly afterwards in the presence of Mr. Parker himself. This last witness also identified Cooper by his cap, similar to the one he was wearing at his hearing before the magistrates. In his letter to Hill, Cooper wrote, "I do not wish to say that any of them spoke wilful untruths. They laboured, however, under a 'deception visus.'" In the view of the sworn statements of the two witnesses mentioned, the magistrates were undoubtedly justified in committing Cooper to Stafford Gaol on a charge of "aiding in a riot at Hanley."

He was not sent off immediately, but remained at Newcastle-under-Lyme until next day, Sunday, August 28, 1842. He had a comfortable night's rest at Superintendent Cottrell's, Captain Mainwaring having given orders that he was to be treated well; and he was allowed to receive some Chartist visitors from Hanley on Sunday morning. At noon, however, he was paraded to the Whitmore railroad station in an open carriage drawn by four horses, and escorted by a troop of cavalry, the 2nd Dragoon Guards, with naked swords in their hands. "This guarding with drawn sabres, and the splendid brass helmets," he wrote Hill, "made me feel I was considered a captive of distinction." At the Whitmore station he was handcuffed to Superintendent Cottrell, and remained manacled during the train ride to Stafford, where he was delivered to the prison and locked up. He first entered Stafford Gaol as a prisoner on August 28, 1842, and here he remained during the six weeks which intervened between his incarceration and his discharge on bail after his first trial.

What were his thoughts and feelings as he entered the gloomy portals of the prison? He has answered this question at the end of the long letter to Hill already quoted, a communication which was written the day after he was locked up. The cheerfulness there manifested was to evaporate later, but at the time of his writing this first letter he was still sustained by his wrought-up feelings, and interested in the novelty of his surroundings. On

August 29th, after having been an inmate of the jail for twenty-four hours, he thus described the experience:

Of course I have slept on the prisoner's proverbial "hard bed." Aye, and it is a hard bed indeed! But then I slept on it with an unstained conscience as to the crime for which I am committed. My meals are supplied to me at my own cost [or rather at the cost of my dearly beloved wife, and of those who are kind enough to help her]<sup>22</sup> by Mr. Peplow, an intelligent Chartist of this place. My sleeping cell is above several stairs; it is but eight feet long and five feet wide; but never mind that. I will bear it with the cheerfulness of a man and a patriot.

At a quarter to six the bell rings for us to rise; we are in our walking-yard and day-room until evening; and at six we are locked up in our sleeping cells \* \* \* I have taken the office of "Chaplain" as they call it, to our ward, and read the form of prayer morning and evening. The prayers are really fine ones, and I feel a high pleasure in filling this office.

Now I might complain, if I were querulous, for who does not know that there is in prison much, to a man of my habits and disposition especially, which is irksome? But no: I am a Chartist and an Englishman, and will neither disgrace my political creed, nor the brave spirit of my forefathers.<sup>23</sup>

On the following day, August 30, he wrote to Hill again. After some complaint because he was allowed only one sheet of paper at a time, and had to hand in the written page before he received another blank one, he describes how he spent the hours of his second night in a prison cell.

I happen to have a few resources within me for whiling away the hours of solitariness. You will recollect my once telling you, my dear Hill, that I committed the first three books of *Paradise Lost* and the whole of *Hamlet* to memory when about two and twenty years of age \* \* \* Last night, when closed up in my sleeping cell, I contrived, by resorting to this inward wealth, to buy some hours of extatic enjoyment within the grated prison. I first repeated the opening half-book of Milton [in a very low tone, of course, for prisoners are not allowed to speak aloud], and then glided from the majesty of *Paradise Lost* to the witching wildness of *Christobel*, repeating as much as I could call to mind of that sin-

<sup>22</sup> At a meeting of the Shakesperean Chartists on September 8th a collection was taken up to help defray the expense of Cooper's defence [*Northern Star*, September 10, 1842] and doubtless there were other such collections both before and after this date.

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Star*, September 3, 1842.

gular, beautiful, and mysterious poem of the singular Coleridge. After running over a few sweetly plaintive pieces of Wordsworth, I changed my enjoyment for music, and partly in a low vocal strain, and partly in a mock whistle, called up to my imagination as fully as I was able the choruses in the Dettingen, Te Deum, the gay pastoral music of Asis and Galatea, and ended my reminiscences for the nonce by imitating the instrumental and vocal pomp of "From the Censor," the grand double chorus in the superb oratorio of Solomon.<sup>25</sup>

On Monday, September 19, 1842, at the close of his third week of imprisonment, he wrote to his wife:

Well, I still look forward with a calm and intrepid hope, not that I shall get out of these toils unscathed, but that I shall be able, undauntedly, though with the modesty of a man, "to speak the truth and fear not." And then I shall be able to meet and endure my sentence as becomes one who has so often displayed to assembled thousands the high and holy example of Latimer, Raleigh, and Algernon Sydney, and all the worthies of Old England. I will hope the best, but meet the worst, as it becomes those to do who have embarked all their hopes and fears—who have thrown their whole being into the struggle for truth.

A fortnight from today and the judges enter Stafford for our trials! How rapidly the time will pass away! and then comes the effort. How exultingly I shall go up to it! I used to feel proud to go out on Sunday evenings to take my stand in Leicester market-place, to deliver truth; but how much more proudly shall I proceed to this trial! My heart will be the lightest in Court that day. It shall be a day of my life, depend upon it.<sup>26</sup>

His trial did not begin until October 11, and during the intervening weeks of imprisonment he estimated that eight hundred persons<sup>27</sup> were arrested for participation in the Pottery riots and clapped into prison with him. It was at this time that Cooper composed several of the simple tales afterwards published as *Wise Saws and Modern Instances* [1845]. He also began at this time an abortive attempt upon the theme he had projected before leaving

<sup>25</sup> *Northern Star*, September 3, 1842.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* September 24, 1842.

<sup>27</sup> This figure [like most others which Cooper gives] seems exaggerated. Citing as his authority the Annual Register of 1842, West states that the total number for trial was 274, of whom the Special Commission sat to try 180 alleged incendiaries during the first week of October, 1842. [*Op. cit.*, p. 193].

Lincoln, the *Purgatory of Suicides*, and composed one hundred lines of blank verse for his contemplated epic. These were abandoned later when he decided to write his poem in Spenserian stanzas.

He relates that during these weeks of imprisonment he suffered considerable anxiety owing to the reports brought in by new prisoners.

"They are laying bottles of port among the gentry at Hanley," said some, "that Cooper will be hanged for treason." "It is confidently said," whispered others, for they were not allowed to talk in an ordinary tone, "that poor old Daddy Richards, as well as Ellis and Cooper, will be transported for life; a dozen witnesses will swear that they were all at the fires in the night, and assisting." <sup>28</sup>

These reports were received at first with sceptical smiles, but after events proved that there was a real seriousness of purpose behind the prosecution.

Prison life and prison thoughts are described in another letter, only recently brought to light. It is addressed to William Freshney, a Lincoln friend, and reads as follows:

I write this letter with a crowd of poor men around me in the day-room of my ward, which is at one end of a graveled yard, in which we walk or sit during the day \* \* \* I am sworn against very heavily \* \* \* charges which I hope to disprove by a large number of respectable witnesses if I can only procure bail and get down for a few days in the Potteries to collect them. My bail is £500 for myself, and two sureties of £250 each. I have written Hebb and Seeley to ask them if they will stand for me. I do not expect it of either of them, but you need not tell them so. My real expectations are from Mullen and Dr. Simpson, but I was determined to put the Lincolners [whom I served so long and truly] to proof for the last time. As loud as they were to condemn Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer when he deceived me so dirtily, I have no doubt they will imitate him—cast me aside like a squeezed orange when I am no longer useful.

Then in a passage of characteristic egotism he adds:

Never mind, my time may come, and I may be where Charley [i. e. Seeley] wants to be so eagerly yet—aye, and perhaps before he gets there too.

<sup>28</sup> "Memoir of W. S. Ellis," loc. cit.

In view of the gourd-like rapidity of growth which Chartism displayed in Leicester under Cooper's cultivation, this hope of being elected to Parliament was not, at the time it was written, entirely preposterous. The letter continues:

I must confess that I have an indescribable horror of transportation. I think if my beloved little wife was taken to heaven I could then cheerfully submit to such a sentence. But trials of no common description have endeared her to me, and I think it would kill me at once if I were to hear the judge say, "Beyond the seas for the term of your natural life." May the merciful guide of my life prevent such a visitation! Yet I do not expect to avoid some punishment by law. I have openly, in Court, acknowledged being present at certain meetings and approving the strike of all work until the Charter was obtained. \* \* \* \*

Cooper decided to conduct his own defence at the forthcoming trial, although he prudently engaged an attorney, William Williams, of Longton, "an honest Radical," to assist him. Williams later secured the services of a barrister named Lee to watch the trial and assist in points of law. Cooper also had the assistance of William Prowting Roberts, "the Chartist Attorney-General," as he was often called. It was from Roberts that he learned a week before he was to appear that, before being tried for "seditious conspiracy," he would first be tried for arson, on the charge of aiding and abetting in the burning of Justice Parker's house.

When he was arraigned on October 11 before Sir Nicholas Conyngham Tindal, Lord Justice of the Common Pleas, in accordance with Robert's advice he refused to plead guilty or not guilty until he was allowed to sever—that is receive trial apart from the seventeen other prisoners with whom he was originally to have been tried—and until he received permission to challenge all members of the jury who had served on any trial during this Special Assize. Although the prosecuting counsel Mr. Waddington, and the Solicitor-General Sir William Follett resisted these demands, Chief Justice Tindal granted them both. In still another letter to Hill written after he had been released

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\* *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, May 17, 1830.

on bail, Cooper said he owed his escape from transportation "almost entirely to the intelligence and fidelity of Mr. Williams and Roberts," particularly to their insistence that he

make a desperate struggle towards obtaining a jury not one member of which had been engaged in a previous trial during the Special Commission \* \* \* Men [who] did not, like their predecessors seem to take it as a matter of course that they were to find every one "guilty" that stood in the dock and was called "the prisoner" by Sir William Follett \* \* \* I feel certain that my fate would have been as hapless as that of poor Ellis, nay, perhaps worse, had not my attorneys advised me to press for a separate trial \* \* \* Although poor injured Ellis has been horribly victimized, and aged Capper is immured for two years in addition to having his goods seized for neglecting some legal form, yet Robinson has wholly escaped his brutal enemies, while I am delivered from the horrors of transportation, and have yet a chance, at least, though it may be a slight one, for establishing my innocence of the remaining "high crimes and misdemeanors" with which I am charged. \* \* \*<sup>30</sup>

Cooper complained bitterly of the unfairness of the Solicitor-General during this first trial both in his addresses to the jury, and in his cross-examination of witnesses. Once, indeed, Cooper sprang to his feet to interrupt and contradict when Sir William addressing the judge and jury said in his deep voice:

"The prisoner at the bar is declared by several witnesses to have said while addressing the crowd that had just returned to Hanley, after burning the house of the Reverend Mr. Vale at Longton, 'My lads, you have done your work well today!' What work, gentlemen? Why the destruction of property to be sure."

"Sir William," [Cooper] cried out, "you are slaughtering me! You know it is false to say that I meant they had done their work well in destroying property. You know that your most intelligent witness, Mr. McBean, declared that the words were 'You have done your work well in turning out the hands.' And those were the words: wrong or right, I shall not deny them."<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, two witnesses, Broomhall and Brundred, swore to Cooper's presence at the fires. But through the testimony of Worthington, Sylvester, and

<sup>30</sup> *Northern Star*, November 26, 1842.

<sup>31</sup> *Life*, p. 216.

others who had been with him every moment of the time from his dismissal of the evening meeting on August 15 until his boarding the train at Crewe the following morning Cooper was able to establish an alibi, in spite of the sworn testimony to the contrary.

At the end of the examination of witnesses Cooper delivered a two hour speech in his own defence, which, according to Roberts, much affected Sir Nicholas Tindal and caused certain feminine spectators to shed tears. He dealt first with the evidence of the witnesses, and their contradictions of each other; second with his own alibi on the night of the riots. He denied that he had recommended any breach of the peace or any violence; declared he had become a democrat from reading the glorious history of Greece; and appealed to the principles of freedom enunciated in the *Magna Charta* and the *Bill of Rights*. An editorial in the *Chronicle* of August 17, referring to him as "the incendiary Cooper," and stating that disorder "had not occurred until he entered the Potteries," he declared was due to the fact that the proprietor of the paper, Sir John Easthope, had lost his place as M. P. from Leicester owing to the spread of Chartist ideas amongst the electors, complete suffrage men having become so numerous that Easthope had been compelled to "give up the registering of electors, and abandon the idea of ever being returned from Leicester again" <sup>32</sup> It was the knowledge that the humble Chartist had done this, the prisoner asserted, which had caused the honorable baronet to publish the editorial in question. He asserted further that he had never seen a gun, pike, or dagger among his Leicester Chartists, and with regard to himself stated, "I have never had arms of my own, nor let off a pistol in my life, nor do I think I could do so." He concluded by giving a sketch of his life, at the close of which he demanded of the jury

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<sup>32</sup> *Address to the Jury by Thomas Cooper \* \* \* [1843]* which reproduces the closing speech in full. The *Northern Star* of October 22, 1842, devoted a whole page to "a full and faithful account of that masterpiece of eloquence and argument."

whether "they coula believe any intent of urging men to the destruction of property could dwell in the mind of one who had spent so much of his life in mental and moral cultivation." <sup>ss</sup>

In his summing up Justice Tindal instructed the jury that on the evidence they could not convict the defendant of arson, and after being out for twenty minutes the jurors returned a verdict of "Not guilty." This acquittal was due of course as much to the unassailable nature of the alibi as it was to Cooper's eloquence. Yet his fellow-prisoner Ellis, who had not severed, but had been tried in a group with twenty others, was convicted in spite of an equally unassailable alibi, and sentenced to twenty-one years transportation.

This first trial ended on Wednesday, October 19; and as there were still two other charges against him Cooper was returned to prison. On the following Friday he was again taken before Chief Justice Tindal and arraigned for "conspiracy" in company with seventy-year old John Richards and the almost equally elderly Joseph Capper. Following this he was arraigned alone for the crime of "sedition." When this third indictment against him was read, he

told the Judge that I would at once plead "guilty," and give the court no further trouble, if he would, as a lawyer, assure me that it was sedition to advise men to "cease labour until the People's Charter became the law of the land,"—for that I had so advised the colliers in the Potteries, and would not deny it: but Sir Nicholas Tindal said he could not assure me that it was seditions.<sup>st</sup>

Acting once more upon the advice of the Chartist counsel Roberts, Cooper requested that his trial on the second two indictments be postponed until the next assizes.

Sir William Follett [he records] smiled with gladness when he heard my request. The ambitious, hard-working, intelligent man was dying; and the fortnight's terrible work at Stafford, though

<sup>ss</sup> *Life*, p. 216.

<sup>st</sup> Cooper, Thomas, *Purgatory of Suicides*, London, 1845.—Preface.

he was paid several thousands for it, hastened his end. He readily consented, and Daddy Richards, as he was always called in the Potteries, was also allowed to traverse.<sup>35</sup>

Following these proceedings the prisoners were once more returned to Stafford Gaol, pending their procurance of acceptable sureties for their release on bail. It was at this time that he first met the unfortunate William Sheratt Ellis, against whose conviction he afterwards so passionately and continually protested as a hideous miscarriage of justice. Cooper's own vivid account of this experience is worthy of quotation at length.

I was taken down into the "glory-hole" or dungeon beneath the court-house, to wait until I could be re-conveyed to the gaol, chained in a gang with some ten others \* \* \*. In that wretched dungeon, among an anxious crowd of at least forty other prisoners, I first clasped the hand of William Ellis.

The feeling of horror which came over me when I first entered that dungeon I cannot describe. All that I had read in the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe and other companion tales of my boyhood, did not serve to prepare me for the shuddering vision of that night. A dirty train-oil lamp hung up in the center of the groined top of this low dungeon served to give it a yellow twilight. The stench arising from a privy in one corner, which, with the filth teeming over, was exposed to sight, together with want of air in a dungeon beneath the ground, and having no natural light or access to air, —coupled with the sight of a crowd of human beings whose haggard looks and sweaty faces told you before they spoke that all were either writhing under the consciousness that their dread doom had come, or was near at hand, brought a deathly sickness over me. A petty tyrant of an under-turnkey entered, snarlingly commanding my wretched companions to stand back, and placing a bucket of vinegar in the center of the dungeon plunged a red-hot iron into it to purify the foul air, and my sickness was relieved. When the underling retired, the men crowded round me: "Oh, Cooper! I have got ten years!" exclaimed one,—and "I have got fifteen!" cried another,—"And I am \* \* \* transported for life!" said another, and hid his face in his hands \* \* \*. Bursts of revengeful feeling succeeded; oaths more dreadful than I must record broke from the lips of those miserable men,—many of whom solemnly averred their innocence,—while others uttered tremendous curses upon the heads of those they declared to be tyrants, who had striven to starve

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<sup>35</sup> *Life*, pp. 217-218.

them, and were now sending them across the sea to end their existence in chains and shame! \* \* \*

Workingmen of England!—can you wonder that in that hour of agonized excitement, during that dreadful display of injury and suffering, can you wonder that I \* \* \* exclaimed, "Would to God I had really known before hand what the Potteries were bent upon that day! We would either have begun the revolution in earnest, or I would have been hung for treason!" \* \* \*

Ellis took me by the arm and led me aside \* \* \* "Come and read the sentence which Judge Tindal has passed on me!" said he, and pointing to the low groined ceiling near the lamp, amidst numerous rude scrawls effected by wretched beings who had at various periods breathed the foul atmosphere of the felon's \* \* \* "glory-hole," I read with horror, "William Ellis, twenty-one years." I gazed into the poor victim's face, and although he essayed to smile, I saw in his eye of despair how deeply the iron of the tyrants had entered his soul \* \* \* "It is such a mockery of justice," [he said]. The evidence against me was so ridiculous \* \* \* I was not permitted to address a single word to the judge: they tore me away, and hurried me down here \* \* \*: I felt as if choking when I found that they would not let me open my mouth, and all was over!"

We walked to and fro during the hour we remained together in that dungeon, pouring into each other's hearts all the strength of consolation and fortitude that we could \* \* \* Ellis conjured me to perseverance, and expressed a deep confidence that since I had been preserved from the ruin which our prosecutors had devised for me, it would be for some great and good end. I assured him the conviction would never leave me while I had breath that the chief struggle of my life ought to be the unwearied and incessant one to procure redress for his wrongs, and the wrongs of all the injured and innocent men who were banished with him.<sup>36</sup>

Cooper nobly redeemed his promise, not only in the "Memoir of W. Sheratt Ellis," published in an obscure four-page Chartist weekly, but also in the preface to the *Purgatory of Suicides*, which made Ellis's story familiar to thousands. In the *English Chartist Circular* Cooper said further of Ellis:

We talked of the great cause in which we had mutually embarked, and of the suicidal quarrels of its leaders. Our hearts beat fully in unison here. What might have been accomplished by this time \* \* \* if the right spirit had possessed each leading spirit in Chartism! \* \* \*

<sup>36</sup> "Memoir of W. S. Ellis," loc. cit.

After that interview in the dungeon I never saw William Ellis again except [one Sunday] through the grated bars of the prison chapel \* \* \*. The night when the first draft of victims were to leave the Gaol in a chain gang, I heard the fetters clang as those injured beings trod along the pavement and passed under the window of my sleeping-cell. I knew that Ellis, and others equally innocent, were amongst their number. A thrill of wonder ran through me as I remembered that I had been acquitted when tried for a crime of the same name and nature as that for which they were thus suffering, although Ellis' innocence was equal with my own.

Reader, if thou art a philosopher, yet do not sneer when I avow that \* \* \* I sprang from my hard straw pallet, and on my knees \* \* \* [prayed I might be] made the instrument for securing justice for those who were now being robbed of its fruits: that \* \* \* I, who had been delivered from "the snare of the fowler" might, although after the toil of many years, see that toil issue in the return of Ellis to his native land.<sup>37</sup>

Joseph Capper, when arraigned with Cooper and Richards for the crime of "conspiracy" had refused to traverse. "I want to go whooam," said the obstinate old man; "try me and get done wi' me. I've done nowt amiss."<sup>38</sup> Accordingly he was tried separately without further delay, speedily found guilty, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Richards was able to arrange for bail during the court's recess, but Cooper had more trouble. After much difficulty he obtained as his second surety Mr. Robert Haimes of Oundle, a beneficent gentleman of eighty who knew Cooper only as a poor Chartist in trouble. But it was necessary for Cooper's lawyer to send four times to Whitehall before recognizance was finally obtained as the result of a special letter to the Clerk of the Crown re-

<sup>37</sup> "Memoir of W. S. Ellis," *loc. cit.* Of the 274 prisoners tried by the Special Commission 54 were sentenced to transportation—11 for life, 13 [including Ellis] for twenty-one years, and the remainder for shorter periods; 146 were sentenced to prison and hard labor for periods varying from two years to ten days; 8 were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment without hard labor; 55 were acquitted; 2 were discharged on entering into recognizances; and 3 [one other besides Richards and Cooper] traversed until the next assizes. *Annual Register*, 1842, Pt. 2, p. 103: cited by West, *J., op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> *Life*, p. 218.

questing him to expedite the discharge of Mr. Cooper. The Staffordshire magistrates proved equally dilatory, and it was only after five weeks of delay that Cooper was finally released on bail of £200 for "certain conspiracies," and of the same amount for "certain misdemeanors." His first imprisonment had thus lasted for eleven weeks, from August 27 to November 12, 1842.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE COMPLETE SUFFRAGE UNION CONFERENCE

Cooper, though he was released from prison on Saturday, November 12, did not reach Leicester until the afternoon of the Monday following. His coming was announced by handbills distributed throughout the town, and upon alighting from the afternoon train he was met by a band of music at the head of a procession of "ten thousand persons," such as had not been seen in the town since the agitation for the Reform Bill. He was escorted through the principal streets in triumph, after which the celebration was continued in the Amphitheatre with a public tea, dancing, and a band concert. By half-past eight, when the speech-making began, not another person could be squeezed into the spacious auditorium. All three of the speakers were political prisoners out on bail. After two long speeches on Chartism and the land question by West and Beesley, Cooper finally arose. During the course of his address he referred to the banished Ellis and his fellow-prisoners with the tears trickling down his cheeks. So moving was his address, which lasted until after midnight, that at its conclusion John Markham, whose bitter quarrel with Cooper we have previously noticed, came forward with outstretched hand to request a reconciliation.

For some days afterward Cooper felt languid and enfeebled, principally he thought on account of his long hours of confinement in the cramped night cell and his sleeping with his clothes on, as he had found the hard straw pallet unendurable. Mrs. Cooper, he declared in one of his letters to the *Star*, had shown herself to possess as stout a heart as any man in Leicester. In his five letters which that weekly published in its issues of November 19 and 26, he referred to Ellis each time. In one of them he declared that while God gave him life he would con-

tinue to proclaim Ellis's wrongs in the ears of his countrymen, in the hope that Peel's administration would be compelled by public opinion to annul the dreadful sentence.

But he found that there was work to be done in Leicester also. Dissensions had sprung up as a result of the leadership of Duffy, whom Cooper had appointed as his deputy, and he returned to find the Shakespereans honeycombed with discord and jealousy. However, with Cooper himself on the scene schisms were temporarily checked. One of his first moves was to lease the Amphitheatre at a weekly rental of £5. Singing classes and drama groups were organized, and a production of *Hamlet* announced. During the first week after his return collections and admissions paid to Cooper's lectures amounted to nine guineas; during the second week to seven pounds.

On December 12 Cooper wrote yet again to the *Northern Star* with reference to Ellis. He advised that, moved by one of his previous letters, a Quaker of Birmingham had promised to pay Mrs. Ellis a shilling a week until her husband's release. A reader having recommended that a brief life of Ellis be drawn up and copies sold for the benefit of his family, Cooper at once wrote to the Potteries requesting materials for the preparation of such a sketch, which he eventually published as a memoir in the *English Chartist Circular*.

During December the Shakespereans assisted also in a political demonstration in Nottingham when Duncombe introduced Gisborne as a parliamentary candidate for that city. Adorned with rosettes, Cooper and O'Connor led the horses of the open carriage in which Mr. Duncombe entered Nottingham, and the Shakesperean Brigade had a prominent place in the procession of Radicals and Chartist who turned out to welcome the member from Finsbury and his political protégé. Duncombe, who was a great sportsman and dandy, and for years had the reputation of being the best-dressed man in the House, made a marked

impression upon Cooper, who declared that he had never seen a handsomer man anywhere.

While he was in Nottingham Cooper had a long conference with O'Connor regarding Chartist affairs, and also discussed with him certain charges against the Executive of the National Association, charges which later this month came up for public hearing. He probably also showed O'Connor at this time the first draft of his plan for reorganizing the Chartist Association.

There has recently come to light still another letter to a former acquaintance in Lincoln describing his hopes and fears at this time. Dated December 7, 1842, and written from Leicester, it begins as follows:

London, to my mind, is the only arena for real action. I think I am but preparing for a future struggle there. Yet I feel that in Leicester I am in the right place at present. I wield, in spite of my poverty, a more powerful influence than any Chartist in England except our chief. My "Shakesperean Brigade" numbers nearly three thousand, and it is more completely under the sway of my "enthusiasm" [you have selected the right word] than is the association in any other town under the influence of any single man. But then I am every moment on full stretch for the poor famishing multitude-lecturing, preaching, leading them in music, the drama, science, etc. And how little does it all avail!

Alas, Brogden, one learns to know what starvation is in a town like this. We never knew what poverty was—we never saw it—in Lincolnshire. Nobody knows what real poverty is in that happy county. I could not have believed that such squalid degradation, such intense misery, existed as I now behold. Depend upon it, the suffering of the manufacturing districts has never been half told. \* \* \*

I have no hope of avoiding a prison next March at Stafford. Yet it does not affright me. My conscience tells me that I have acted for the best. If I have erred I cannot blame myself. I saw—and still see—such hellish tyranny inflicted by the grinding manufacturers, that I cannot see anything in prospect but the Charter that would effectually relieve the suffering millions. \* \* \*

I hoped to have been in London for a week about this time, having written a lot of tales while in prison, and wishing to try their acceptance with some publisher—and also wishing to spend a few days

in my old favourite haunt, the Museum Library, in order to collect some materials for a large work I propose to complete during my next imprisonment—but I cannot raise the wind, so must stay where I am.<sup>1</sup>

Another outbreak of hostilities occurred this month between the Complete Suffrage Union supporters and the Leicester Chartists, particularly those under Cooper's leadership. At the previous conference of the Sturge organization it had been agreed that delegates to the second conference, whose opening was now at hand, should be elected half by electors [*i.e.* those already in possession of the franchise] and half by non-electors [workingmen without the right to vote] unless—in most cases a useless proviso—the two groups could mutually agree to elect the same persons.

In order to obtain a majority of the delegates, and consequent control of the convention, O'Connor was straining every nerve to get his supporters elected. A fortnight before the assembling of the conference his mouthpiece was fulminating:

We last week called upon the people in those localities where their counsellors had entered into any compromise with the Sturgeites to interpose their right at the public meetings for the election of delegates, and to do their own business, and to do it well by electing out and out Chartists as their representatives to the forthcoming Birmingham Conference. We did so because we conceived that the utmost vigilance, always necessary, is more so now; seeing that the enemy has put on the face of an angel of light in order to effectually beguile the unwary; and that consequently this new move is more likely to turn aside unreflecting leaders, and to open a wide gap for the designing \* \* \*. We are the more urgent because the card to be played at Birmingham is of the last consequence to the cause of Chartism, and will, in all likelihood, end either in the increased union of our forces, and consolidation of our strength, or in dividing and scattering us abroad to the four winds of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, May 11, 1929, for complete text of this letter, the original of which is in the possession of Sir Richard Winfrey, of Castor House, Peterborough, who possesses also the original ms. of the *Purgatory of Suicides*.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842.

The imbroglio at Leicester developed from a disagreement as to how that city's four delegates to the conference were to be chosen, whether by electors and non-electors separately, or by the two groups acting together. Cooper favored the second alternative, stating, in his letter to the *Star* setting forth his side of the controversy, that he had reflected deeply while in prison upon the grievous fact that liberty had been stifled chiefly through the quarrels of its advocates, and had resolved henceforth to have no part in the mad broils which prevented the success of the people's cause. With these feelings fully possessing his heart he had resolved to seek union with all who were honestly seeking the enfranchisement of the people. But the Sturgeites could not forget the way in which Cooper and his obstreperous "brigade" had heckled, hooted, and obstructed O'Brien, Vincent, Murray, and others at Complete Suffrage Union meetings, and to Cooper's surprise and sorrow their leader, the Reverend J. P. Mursell, continued to stimulate a spirit of hostility towards the Chartist.

When the Sturgeites advertised a meeting of the electors of the borough for the purpose of appointing two delegates to go to Birmingham, a course perfectly consistent with the rules of procedure laid down by the first conference, Cooper and his followers immediately took fire. As a matter of fact personal animosity against the Shakespearian General was one of the principal reasons for a decision to hold a separate elector's meeting. "I will not sit in a conference where Cooper is," Mursell asserted vehemently; "I will have no share in a deputation with such a fellow, and I know he will be elected."<sup>3</sup> Even after this declaration Cooper says that he continued his efforts to effect a reconciliation, but finding that the Union was determined to hold its meeting, he warned them that such a gathering would be illegal, and that delegates elected at a meeting from which non-electors were barred would be liable to transportation. As the laws with regard to polit-

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<sup>3</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842; Cooper's letter "To the Editor".

ical associations were still very rigorous, and sometimes freakish in their severity, this assertion gave pause to the Mursell party, but after consulting with authorities on the matter, they decided that Cooper's claim was not well founded, and again announced a separate meeting for borough electors only.

As Cooper was an elector, he attended the meeting in company with half a dozen Shakespereans similarly qualified. They were admitted by a private entrance to the New Hall, while outside a howling mob of non-electors raged around the main entrance to the building, which was guarded by a small body of police. So great was the uproar outside that the Chairman of the meeting finally announced that the proceedings would have to be postponed, both on account of the noise, and because electors were being prevented from entering by the uproarious Chartists outside. Thereupon Cooper "calmly and quietly" begged the Chairman to act upon his offer of union. "If you are willing," he said to the Sturgeites, "my party will agree to vote for two of your members if you will vote for two of ours." "We want none of your advice," was the reply; "we will have nothing to do with you."<sup>4</sup>

It was now found to be impossible to adjourn the meeting without at the same time admitting the raging crowd outside. A messenger let out of the back door was despatched for more police, but before they could arrive someone on the inside unbarred the main doors, and the mob thereupon "rushed in in hundreds, and took possession of the hall with cheers and clapping of hands." Two Shakespereans then proposed a third member of the Brigade as Chairman. He was immediately elected, and according to Cooper the new meeting opened in a most quiet and orderly manner. The first speaker was, of course, the Shakesperean General. He "recounted the various steps he had taken to secure union, and appealed to every candid man present whether the insincerity of the Complete Suffragists was not fully apparent." He closed by moving

<sup>4</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842, *loc. cit.*

"that the meeting do disperse, and that a public meeting of the inhabitants of Leicester be held in the Amphitheatre next Wednesday night for the purpose of choosing four electors to represent the electors and non-electors in the Birmingham Conference." The motion was passed unanimously. Markham and others then addressed the crowd, and the meeting broke up at ten o'clock with the usual Chartist songs and cheers.<sup>5</sup>

The account in the *Leicestershire Mercury*, written by a Complete Suffrage Union partisan, which was headed "Scandalous Outrage and Chartist Riot" presents quite a different version of what had happened. According to the *Mercury*, the crowd outside the building, described as "a number of the most notorious wretches belonging to the faction in this town," forcibly obstructed the entry of electors, and roughly handled several of them. It was alleged further that the doors to the wall were burst open by force, and the room "quickly occupied with the lowest rabble of Leicester, with Cooper most appropriately at their head." This account concluded, "Prisoners out on bail need rather more caution than this man seems to be gifted with. His reckless violence will doubtless not be forgotten at his trial; nor, we trust, in his sentence."

Party feeling, it will be observed, was quite as high between the right and left advocates of the extension of the suffrage as it was between crusted Tory and reforming Whig. One reason for the bitterness is brought out in that important part of a letter, the postscript, in the first paragraph of which Cooper stated:

I think I ought to add that throughout the whole of my attempt to test the sincerity of the Complete Suffragists, there was one way discovered by which I might at once have secured their confidence. What was that? It was—forsaking O'Connor. I was taunted again and again with my servility, and the general servility of the Chartists, to Feargus. *That* I have always disowned, for every man lies who dares call Cooper servile. But my invariable answer was, "No, I cannot lose my devoted attachment to O'Connor as long as I have the same confidence in the nobleness of his heart that I have now.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

I have conversed with greater intelligence than O'Connor, but I have never known a heart more devoted to great principles, more earnestly and enthusiastically and disinterestedly consecrated to the pursuit and establishment of them." I may be mistaken, but I have watched the movements of O'Connor's heart in private, and I think I know what I am talking about.<sup>6</sup>

Alas for human nature! Within a few months after Cooper's release from prison he and O'Connor were quarreling furiously, and Cooper was convinced, quite mistakenly, that O'Connor's motives in the land scheme which he was then sponsoring, were at the utmost remove from any generous or noble purpose.

The public meeting announced by Cooper for the Amphitheatre was duly held on December 19, and four Chartist delegates, one of them Cooper, were elected to represent Leicester at the Birmingham conference.<sup>7</sup>

A few hours before this election meeting, which was attended by "two thousand persons and upwards", Cooper received a letter from the Complete Suffrage Union headquarters in Birmingham advising that "in as far as they understood the circumstances connected with the appointment of delegates from Leicester they could not receive *four* delegates, should they be appointed at such a meeting."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, "the Shakespereans having long tried and now deeply proved the craft and deceit of the Complete Suffrage humbugs, were resolved to defy them, and elected *four* delegates accordingly;"<sup>9</sup> delegates, be it noted, to a conference called by the very organization they were "defying." Such a spirit of antagonism between the two factions prophesied the subsequent failure of the conference as plainly as thunder foretells the storm.

On December 27, 1842, in the Mechanics Institute building on Newhall street, Birmingham, this second conference of the Complete Suffrage Union finally met. Among

<sup>6</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842.

<sup>7</sup> *Northern Star*, December 24, 1842.

<sup>8</sup> Yet the four delegates were evidently accepted by the Conference, as their names appear in the list of delegates published in the newspapers.

<sup>9</sup> *Northern Star*, December 24, 1842.

the 374 delegates was Herbert Spencer, then a young man, representing the Derby Complete Suffrage Union. Cooper, who was present with the other Chartist delegates from Leicester, was impressed when he saw so many persons belonging to the middle class, and felt that their presence proved that the Chartist cause was really advancing. Unfortunately there was no feeling of friendliness towards the workingmen on the part of most members of the Union. Shortly before this time the Council of the Union, fearing that the number of O'Connor's followers at the conference might be sufficient to commit the Complete Suffrage Union to the Charter in name as well as principle, had secretly prepared a bill of their own to take the place of the Charter. This "People's Bill of Rights", as it was named, was not completed until a few days before the Conference met, and knowledge of it was confined to the Council, with the exception of that body's Chartist members, Neesom and Lovett.

After Sturge had been unanimously elected Chairman the first business brought before the Conference was a resolution "That the People's Bill of Rights form the basis from which a petition to Parliament shall be presented." Copies of the bill had been laid on the desks of the delegates before the meeting, but, since it was several pages long, no one had had time to read it through, much less to study it. The Chartists knew nothing of the new proposal, and their discontent and indignation found an unexpected leader in William Lovett, who rose to state that the proposed bill had been drawn up without his knowledge or consent, and to move that the People's Charter form the basis from which the petition should be drawn for presentation to Parliament. Upon the issue thus sharply drawn, debate, some of it "very stormy," proceeded for some time. Two clergymen, Patrick Brewster, the Paisley "Christian Chartist," and the Reverend Thomas Spencer [uncle of the philosopher] supported the new measure; but the vicar of Warwick, famous, fat Parson Wade, who was an active Owenite and had attended the first Chartist convention,

spoke out roundly against it. "What is this 'Bill of Rights'?" he demanded; "this mysterious something which we are expected to swallow—this thing begotten in darkness and brought forth in a coal-hole, this

*Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum?*

I wonder at the effrontery \* \* \* of any party who can call together a Conference like this, and mock us with such a proposition."<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Heyworth was equally emphatic on the opposite side. "We will espouse your principles, but we will not have your leaders," he cried; and when the outcry against him grew strong he became still more offensive—"I say again," he shouted, "we'll not have you, you tyrants!"<sup>11</sup> On the second day of the Conference James William moved and Cooper seconded a resolution that both the Charter and the People's Bill of Rights be laid on the table, but they had hardly half a dozen supporters. When the question was finally put to a vote the majority against the Bill of Rights was approximately three to one. Sturge and his friends refused to acquiesce in the decision, and withdrew to a local temperance hotel to hold a conference by themselves.

In the larger body which was left, a friend of O'Connor's was elected as Chairman and Lovett as Secretary. But it was impossible for the factions headed by these two men to work together. The contempt and scorn with which Lovett regarded O'Connor was not to be mitigated by the latter's barefaced flattery, and after two days the "moral force" Chartists also withdrew. The rump thus left approved a new plan of organization for the Chartist Association which Cooper submitted; after which they fell to quarreling among themselves over charges against the National Executive, and finally disbanded without the formality of adjournment. A day or two before the final break-up Cooper took round his cap to the delegates, soliciting contributions for the support of Mrs. Ellis and her

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<sup>\*</sup> *Life*, p. 225.

<sup>\*\*</sup> *Life*, p. 224

small children. The £3 6s. thus collected he forwarded to the *Northern Star*, with the request that it be augmented by a public subscription, in behalf of which he made a moving appeal.

Herbert Spencer, who as a supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union had withdrawn with Sturge and his adherents, has left a brief account of the proceedings of that group.

Deeper knowledge of human nature on the part of those who summoned the Conference [he observes] might have taught them that the Chartists would listen to no compromise. Fanatics soon acquire passionate attachment to their shibboleths. After a day's debate it became evident that no cooperation was possible. Even the very name "the Charter" was insisted upon as one which must be accepted. A division consequently took place, and the Complete Suffragists adjourned to another hall. A proposed Act of Parliament had been drawn up, embodying the desired constitutional changes. This, it was hoped, the Chartists would join in discussing clause by clause, and in the main agree to. On their refusal the Complete Suffragists by themselves, in the space of two days, went through the Bill, now approving, now modifying its various provisions. The occasion was of course one which to a young fellow of twenty-two was exciting; and it produced in me a high tide of mental energy. This is curiously shown by my copy, still preserved, of the draft Bill distributed among the delegates, on which I have written my name. The signature has a sweep and vigor exceeding that of any other signature I ever made, either before or since.<sup>12</sup>

As for the insistence upon the very name of the Charter, which Spencer so lightly dismisses as a mere shibboleth, it was, as Cooper declared, a sacred trust to the older Chartists, which it was a point of honor to maintain. Julian Harney forcibly voiced their feelings, as follows:

Give up the Charter! The Charter for which O'Connor and hundreds of brave men were dungeoned in felon's cells, the Charter for which John Frost was doomed to a life heart-withering woe! \* \* \* What, to suit the whims, to please the caprice, or serve the selfish ends of mouthing priests, political traffickers, sugar-weighing, tape-measuring shopocrats? Never! By the memories of

<sup>12</sup> Spencer, Herbert, *An Autobiography*, N. Y. 1904 [two vols.] 1; 251-252.

the illustrious dead, by the sufferings of widows and tears of orphans, he would adjure them to stand by the Charter."<sup>13</sup>

With less reckless distribution of epithets, but with equal ardor of feeling, Gammage has expressed the same sentiments. Admitting that the proposed Bill covered the six points of the People's Charter he felt, nevertheless, that the introduction of the measure was "impolitic in the extreme."

The Chartist body had long fought under the banner of the Charter. From the sufferings that thousands had undergone, from the sort of living martyrdom that thousands more were undergoing at that moment, the name of the Charter had become endeared to them; it had, in fact, become a household word. To endeavour, therefore, at one blow to set that name aside, was seeking to obliterate all remembrance of the past. \* \* \* To give up the name of the Charter was a sort of political sacrilege.<sup>14</sup>

The Complete Suffragists, on the other hand, felt that after they had agreed to the principles of the Charter, it was straining at a gnat to insist that they adopt the name also. They felt, indeed, that it was the policy of wisdom to get rid of the name, if they were to hope for success in their program of appeal to Radicals of all classes.

As we have seen, after the withdrawal of Lovett and his adherents the principal business transacted by the thirty-seven delegates who remained was the recommendation to the members of the National Chartist Association that Cooper's plan of reorganization be adopted. A first draft of this plan, upon which its author had been at work for several months, was published in the *Northern Star* of December 10, 1842, a fortnight before the opening of the Sturge conference. This called for annual conventions, to which delegates were to be elected from districts decided upon at the Sturge meeting; and provided that a new kind of Executive Committee, elected to office for a year at each annual conference, was to transact the business of the Association at rotated quarterly meetings to be held, after the first, in London, Birmingham, and Manchester. National

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<sup>13</sup> *Northern Star*, January 14, 1843.

<sup>14</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 260.

expenses were to be met by dues of a penny a month; local expenses by dues of a penny a week for the three remaining weeks of the month. The final amended plan, as approved by the Chartist remnant on the fourth day of the Conference, was published in the *Star* on January 7, 1843. It consisted of twenty-four sections, arranged under eleven headings. It provided, in addition to the foregoing, that any officer of the Chartist Association who should join an organization having for its object "a less measure of justice than the People's Charter" was to be expelled; and closed with a recommendation that Chartists practice temperance, cultivate the intellect, fulfill the Golden Rule, and assist one another in finding employment, and in sickness and distress.

An important innovation which Cooper's plan provided was that both national and local dues were to be collected only "from each member of the Association who can afford the same." Cooper was insistent that subscription to the principles of the Charter, and a promise to pay the penny dues as soon as possible, should be the only requirement for membership. "A card cannot make a Chartist," he argued; "poverty cannot unmake one." "Let us," he pleaded, "be bold enough to proclaim that we acknowledge and reckon every one among our number who is manly enough to offer his name \* \* \* that we confide in the honour of every man, however ragged and despised, who offers his name as a Chartist, without attempting to tie him *forcibly* down to \* \* \* paying a copper."<sup>15</sup>

"Let me but see some workable plan of reorganization put into operation ere I am once more caged," Cooper wrote in December, "and I, for one, shall return to captivity solidly satisfied \* \* \* that Chartism will henceforth grow into a mighty and uncontrollable [sic] machine for overthrowing tyranny and elevating the toiling slave to his rightful and proud position of equality."<sup>16</sup>

But this he was not to see. After expressing approbation of Cooper's purpose, and admitting that his plan was

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<sup>15</sup> *Northern Star*, December 17, 1842.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

better than the one then in operation, the editor of the *Northern Star*, in a long article published in January, 1843, went on to quote the statute "39 Geo. II c. 79" against "unlawful confederations," and expressed it as his unqualified opinion that the following of Cooper's plan was certain to result in an illegal organization. Cooper had foreseen such an objection, and replied to it in detail, concluding:

I think, my dear Hill, \* \* \* [that] the grand scheme of an annual representative assembly is legally practicable. And if it be, it is almost impossible to overstate the benefits likely to arise to Chartism from such a periodical bringing together of the most active spirits of the movement. What a soothing down of asperities from a true understanding of each other; what a mutual infusion and reciprocation of intelligence and energy; what a solid growth and building up to the stern fabric of democracy, must result from the institution of that annual convention.<sup>17</sup>

Although Chartist conventions continued to be held until 1853 [not, however, in accordance with Cooper's plan] none of them, unfortunately, produced the benefits predicted. On the contrary asperities continued to multiply and to increase in bitterness, both in the conventions and outside of them, one of the most grievous quarrels being that between O'Connor and Cooper in 1845. One reason for the failure of Chartism was the utter inability of its leaders to plan and work together.<sup>18</sup>

"A fuss was made about 'Organization' for a time, but no real and effective organization ever took place," was Cooper's scornful summary of the situation when he came to write his autobiography.

The failure of the second Sturge conference marked the end of the Complete Suffrage Union, which henceforth steadily dwindled in numbers and importance, finally disappearing into obscurity and dissolution as its rival was to disappear a decade later. While the dispute which wrecked this first attempt to unite the middle and working classes

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, April 15, 1843.

<sup>18</sup> "Two things insured our failure: we were not equal to our task, and also we were before our time. Note yet a third: there was no organization towards action. Our work was a protest; we had no plan beyond that." Linton, W. J.

was one over words, as Hovell has well said, "it was no mere question of words that brought Chartist of all sorts into momentary forgetfulness of their ancient feuds to resist the attempt to wipe out the history of their sect. The split of the Conference arose from the essential incompatibility of the smug ideals of the respectable middle-class Radical, and the vague aspirations of the angry, hot-headed workman, bitterly resenting the sufferings of his grievous lot, and especially intolerant of the employing class from which Sturge and his friends came."<sup>19</sup>

But the Chartist ranks could unite only in opposition to a common foe. Once the necessity of presenting a solid front had ceased, the interminable internecine dissensions which had plagued the movement from the beginning broke out anew. Not only was there the implacable feud between Lovett and O'Connor, but there were constant petty quarrels between Feargus and the lesser leaders, one of which came to a head at the close of the Sturge conference. It arose partly from the circumstance that Cooper had written an indiscreet letter to "Commodore" Hull, in which he said, apparently with reference to the recently completed draft of his reorganization scheme: "You will see how we have spoken out against the humbug Executive. George [White] and Julian [Harney] and the Editor at Leeds [Hill] and our Generalissimo all go with me." He also stated with reference to Campbell, the National Secretary, whom he accused of "O'Brienizing," [*i. e.* sympathizing with the Sturge party, and opposing O'Connor] that "he must be stopped, or we shall all strike on the breakers together." Shortly before Christmas Mead indiscreetly displayed this letter at Hull, where there was a party strongly opposed to O'Connor, one of whose members stole the communication and afterwards circulated printed copies of it "all over the country" as proof of O'Connor's having conspired with certain other Chartist against the Executive. This making public of the letter occurred just as the Con-

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<sup>19</sup> Hovell, *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

ference was meeting, and seems to have divided the tertiary foliation of that body into two camps consisting of supporters and opponents of the Executive, which body demanded a public hearing upon the charges against them.

This was granted and an account of the proceedings appeared in the *Star* of January 7, 1843, over the signature of "Thomas Cooper of Leicester, Secretary of the Meeting." From this report it appears that Cooper had criticized three members of the Executive—Bairstow, Leach, and Campbell—to O'Connor as early as July; and earlier in December when he met O'Connor again at Nottingham, he had included M'Douall in his charges. These were rather vague, but may be summed up as insolence, slackness, wastefulness, malversation, and responsibility for the failure of the strike for the Charter. O'Connor denied that he had plotted against the Executive. With reference to Cooper's assertion that O'Connor, Hill, White, and Harney all went with him in opposition to the Executive, Feargus declared that he "went with" the Shakesperean General only insofar as to approve of his ideas of reorganization, "but in no other way." This Cooper confirmed. "So far from plotting with him against the Executive," O'Connor asserted further, "I earnestly urged him to use his influence \* \* \* not to make any public attack upon the Executive, but to write to them privately."<sup>20</sup> White and Harney entered similar denials, Harney concluding his letter to Campbell with the objurgation, "Avaunt, hell-fiend!" This, as Gammage sensibly observes, was a waste of his venom, for "if anyone deserved his wrath it was Cooper, who had given very good cause for suspecting that such a conspiracy existed."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Northern Star*, February 4, 1843—"The Editor \* \* \* to his Readers."

<sup>21</sup> Gammage, R. G., *op. cit.*, p. 264. He continues: "We must here also observe that although no direct conspiracy might exist at that time against the Executive, \* \* \* neither O'Connor nor any of his salaried servants exhibited a good feeling toward that body \* \* \* Although but little was done openly against it, secret whisperings were at work to bring it into discredit, and thus to mar its usefulness."

The "investigation" required two days for full discussion not only of the Cooper letter, but also of the mass of communications, resolutions, and articles expressing views of similar import which had appeared from time to time in the *Northern Star*. The outcome was indecisive. A resolution was first offered declaring that in the opinion of the meeting the members of the Executive had been "neither morally nor politically dishonest," but was later withdrawn, on the ground that the questions raised could not be decided because of the absence of supporting documents. Largely, it would appear, as the result of this investigation the Executive shortly afterwards either resigned or was suspended.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For the full text of the Cooper Report see *Northern Star*, January 7, 1843; cf. Hovell, M., *op. cit.*, p. 263.

## CHAPTER XVI

### COOPER'S SECOND TRIAL AND PRISON SENTENCE

Upon returning to Leicester Cooper found that strife and dissension, temporarily checked by the excitement attending his release and the election of conference delegates, had again reared its ugly head. The *Star's* Leicester correspondent noted sadly that:

The Shakespereans have mustered but seldom since the Conference; Mr. Cooper has been ill, and the misunderstandings which originated in that evil occurrence commonly called 'the strike', and during Mr. Cooper's absence and imprisonment, have lately broken out into very bad feeling. It is hoped, however, that these unlucky phenomena will soon cease to manifest themselves, and that things will speedily revert to their old and prosperous course.<sup>1</sup>

Trouble within his Chartist organization was only one of Cooper's burdens; he was also bowed down by a load of debt—to his baker for bread given to the poor, to Cleave for Chartist publications sold at his newspaper office; to Warwick for the printing of the *Commonwealthsman* and other publications, and to his lawyer, not only for his own defense but for that of Richards also, whose obligations he had taken upon himself.

For the purpose of raising funds to discharge the legal part of these indebtednesses the Shakespereans towards the end of January put on the play of Hamlet, with Cooper in the title role. Two performances were given, and although the Amphitheatre, which had a seating capacity of three thousand, was crowded each night, the admission fees were small and the expenses of production large. In spite of the play's being produced as a "benefit" the performers were all paid for their time and reimbursed for

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<sup>1</sup> *Northern Star*, January 14, 1843.

their costumes. As a result, instead of producing a surplus the receipts were barely sufficient to cover expenses.

The months of January and February 1843 finally passed away "very drearily," unemployment and poverty continuing their grip on the miserable working population. On the last day of February Cooper went up to London to interview Duncombe regarding the case of William Ellis. Passionately convinced of Ellis's innocence, Cooper left no stone unturned during his brief period of liberty to obtain justice for the condemned man. "I regret to say," he wrote to editor Hill, "that some one had made an unfavorable impression regarding poor Ellis upon Mr. Duncombe's mind prior to my seeing him. That I have removed it gives me inexpressible satisfaction. My vow, at least the most important of it, is now fulfilled."<sup>2</sup>

The following Sunday, March 5, he twice addressed the Shakespereans by way of farewell, and a little later in the week set off for his second trial at Stafford, going by way of Birmingham. In this city he visited John Mason, who, he found, had given up lecturing, and returned to his trade of shoemaking, "feeling himself bound as an independent man to do this in preference to perambulating the land and becoming a burthen to the people in the present poverty-stricken condition of Chartism."<sup>3</sup>

Proceeding on to Wednesbury, Cooper delivered two addresses there on Sunday. In this town the Chartists were building a People's Hall, he reported, and prospects looked "solidly promising," but at Bilston and adjoining towns he found that Chartism had been "sorely shattered."

The following day, March 13, he arrived in Stafford, but his case was not called until a week later. His trial began on his birthday, March 20, on which date he was forty-eight years old. The counsel arrayed against him included "four regular grooms in horsehair wigs."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Star*, March 4, 1843.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18, 1843.

<sup>4</sup> *Preface to Purgatory of Suicides*.

two of whom, Mr. Godson and Thomas Noon Talfourd, were also Members of Parliament.

The charge was for "seditious conspiracy," and included also Richards, Capper [previously sentenced to two years' imprisonment] and Ellis [already exiled]. Cooper refused to employ counsel, or to obtain legal assistance of any kind, but acted alone in defense of himself, Richards and Capper. "I was greatly angered," he wrote in the preface to his *Prison Rhyme*, "at the *crookedness* of the law or custom that rendered it possible for me to stand indicted for conspiracy with the poor exile whom I had never seen or communicated with in my life till we became prisoners," and his sense of outrage was raised to a still higher point when he found from Talfourd's opening speech "that it was intended, by what I considered most villainous unfairness, to revive the old charge of 'aiding to burn and demolish' in this second trial."<sup>1</sup>

Talfourd, who opened the case for the Crown, in the course of his long speech declared:

It may be said that Mr. Cooper did not intend that these injuries should proceed to the extent to which they did. It is possible that he might have left the county shocked at the extent to which they had proceeded; but it is for you [the jury] to say whether the expressions used \* \* \* should have had any other purpose than raising the passions of those who were present to acts and deeds of outrage, for the purpose of striking dismay into the hearts of those who were disposed to oppose the Charter—whether that was not the scheme [although the plunder and drunkenness might have been without scheme] which the defendants had in view—whether they could have had any other object than to have the police-officers attacked and the law resisted. If they did that, then they are guilty of the offense charged on this record \* \* \*. The charge, you will observe is one of conspiracy, and, in order to convict any or all of the defendants, it is not necessary that I should shew you that the person himself individually did some act with the intent charged in the indictment—that he made speeches inducing the people to resist the authority of the law—but I must further shew you that

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Purgatory of Suicides*.

that which was done was done in concert with two persons at least. It is not necessary that I shew it was done by two of the defendants. \* \* \* If it was done by one of them in concert with another not before you, then this charge is made out.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the witnesses, Cooper insists, "were the very scum of the Potteries \* \* \* [who] would have sworn away any man's life for a few shillings."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly he subjected all of the witnesses for the prosecution to a grilling cross-examination, much of it questioning designed to lay bare their evil records. Judge Erskine allowed wide latitude in examination and exhibited a patience truly admirable.

Although the court sat on the first day until nearly nine o'clock at night, only two witnesses were examined that day. The first of these testified that Cooper in his speech of April 10 [during a former visit to the Potteries] had referred several times to the Queen's bastards. He was not sure that Cooper had not mentioned Charles II, but he was certain he was not mistaken in thinking it was Queen Victoria to whom Cooper had alluded. He also swore to seeing Cooper in Hanley on August 12, though the prisoner was able to prove without difficulty that he was in Stafford on that day, and to compel Talfourd to admit that his witness was mistaken on this point, as he certainly was in regard to Cooper's having slandered the Queen.

On Tuesday the Court sat from nine in the morning until past seven in the evening. Five witnesses were examined. Capper also cross-examined several times. Mr. Davenport, a surgeon of Tunstall, declared that he did not consider Capper a loyal subject. "I call a man loyal," he testified, "who supports the monarchy of the country, and also its laws and religion. Mr. Capper has spoken in my

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<sup>6</sup> *Northern Star*, April 1, 1843. This issue contained a full and detailed account in twenty newspaper columns (pp. 5, 6, 7, and 8) of this second trial, taken, it is stated, "without any deduction but the sneers from the *Staffordshire Advertiser* up to Friday night, and thenceforward from the *Times*."

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, pp. 229-230.

hearing against the Constitution of kings, lords, and commons. I have heard him say that the House of Commons was corrupt, and that the people were not represented [there]." Cooper inquired whether it was, then "true that the House of Commons was perfectly upright, that the people are represented there, that every member is immaculate and distinguished for honesty?" The question was, of course, ruled to be out of order.

On Wednesday Cooper cross-examined the first witness for three hours and a half regarding his Chartist sermon. Only three witnesses were heard on this day. On Thursday, by his cross-examination of the first witness, James Wilding, whom Cooper persistently reiterated was a paid tool of the League, he tried to show not only that the witness was utterly despicable and untrustworthy, but also that it was the oppression of the manufacturers, all supporters of the Anti-Corn Law League, which had caused the late riots.

All of the witnesses of the following day swore that Cooper had been present at the fires. The first, a chemist named Abington, had given the evidence which had convicted Ellis. He swore that he had seen Cooper near Mr. Forrester's burning house, and was supported by his friend H. L. Pierce, also a chemist. A Hanley policeman testified to the same effect, as did Broomhall, who had previously so testified at the Special Assizes. Cooper was put to the trouble and expense of again producing witnesses to prove an alibi; but was finally completely victorious, for in summing up Judge Erskine told the jury he would not read his notes on the evidence designed to prove Cooper's presence at the fires, but would "write *Mistake* on all the pages, instead."<sup>8</sup>

At the conclusion of Broomhall's testimony on Friday several members of the jury begged that the court might be adjourned, as they had been in the box since Monday. The request was denied upon Talfourd's advising the judge that the remaining evidence for the prosecution would require

<sup>8</sup> *Life*, p. 231.

but a few more minutes, although one of the jurors observed that Cooper's cross-examination might nevertheless last four or five hours. Judge Erskine announced the next day that the other indictment for "seditious conspiracy" would have to be postponed until the next assizes. As a matter of fact Cooper was never prosecuted on this charge, but was sentenced to imprisonment for two years at the close of this trial for "seditious conspiracy."<sup>9</sup>

The case for the prosecution was concluded on Saturday by still another witness swearing to Cooper's having been at the fires, and by the testimony of Major Power Trench of the 2nd Dragoon Guards, who had given the command to fire which had resulted in the death of one of the rioters.<sup>10</sup> The Major declared he had no alternative but to fire on the threatening crowd, and that he was convinced this course had saved a great loss of life and property in the Potteries.

This completed the case for the prosecution early on Saturday morning, instead of that night as Cooper had hoped, as he would then have had the intervening Sunday in which to prepare his rebuttal. He began his defence at once, however, commenting upon the evidence and repeating his conviction that the Anti-Corn Law League was responsible for the riots. On the resumption of court on Monday morning he continued his attack upon the League, reading speeches by Cobden and resolutions adopted at the League's conferences, and demanding if such language on the part of those who held responsible posts in the government were to go unnoticed while humble Chartists like himself, who had sincerely advocated peace, law, and order, were to be punished. He went on to expound the principles of the Charter, which had formed the basis of his

<sup>9</sup>Judge Erskine stated also that it would be impossible for him to attend the assizes at Shrewsbury, but he would endeavor to be present at the opening of the commission at Hereford on Tuesday. But this, too, proved to be impossible, as Cooper's trial was not concluded until Thursday, and the Judge and three Queen's Counsels were accordingly delayed in joining the circuit at Hereford and afterwards at Monmouth.

<sup>10</sup>Cooper consistently refers to this officer as "Major Beresford." (Vide *Life* pp. 198 and 230). I cannot account for this mistake.

sermon in the Potteries during the previous April, and recounted once more the particulars of his early life, "in order that the jury might judge from the details of that history whether he was a personality likely to commit the crime with which he was charged."

In conclusion he expressed a conviction that the jury would never return a verdict against such humble men as the defendants "when magistrates, Members of Parliament, and members of the Anti-Corn Law League were allowed to go at large unprosecuted and unpunished. If, however, the judgment of the jury was adverse, he would bow with due respect. This, however, he might be allowed to say: a verdict of guilty would not subdue the spirit of a Chartist conscious that in all he had done he had only sought to benefit his fellow-man." When he finally concluded he had spoken in all about ten hours. In his autobiography he has recorded:

I do not think I ever spoke so powerfully in all my life as during the last hour of that defense. The peroration, the Stafford papers said, would never be forgotten; and I remember as I sat down, panting for breath and utterly exhausted, how Talfourd and Erskine and the jury sat transfixed, gazing at me in silence; and the whole crowded place was breathless, as it seemed for a minute.<sup>11</sup>

After short speeches by Richards and Capper, the witnesses for the defense were called. The prosecution in most instances declined to cross-examine, for as Cooper remarked, "The Judge and Counsel and Jury were all wearied, and hastened to come to an end."<sup>12</sup>

Judge Erskine took nearly all of Thursday to sum up.<sup>13</sup> He instructed the jury that:

If they were of the opinion that the defendants intended influencing the Government or the Legislature by force and intimidation, then the charge in the indictment was fully made out.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 230. It is such passages as this doubtless which led Hugh Walker to remark that "Cooper had a good deal of self-esteem, which sometimes bears a close resemblance to self-conceit." *Literature of the Victorian Era*, p. 350.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cooper mistakenly says Tuesday in the *Life*.

Alluding to the turn-out at the Ridgeway "manufactory" the Judge stated that

If a mob of people in the manner the witness had described went and by terror or by force compelled them to desist from their work, that meeting was an unlawful meeting; and if they were satisfied that that was recommended by Cooper, the defendant, and was the result of previous conspiracy between him and \* \* \* any other persons, then that would satisfy the charges upon this indictment.<sup>14</sup>

It took the jury only five minutes to arrive at a verdict of guilty. The trial had lasted for ten days, and "the County newspapers made testy complaints of the 'insolent' daring of a Chartist who had thrown the whole county business of Staffordshire and Shropshire and Herefordshire into disorder," but as Cooper observes, "they were, of course, quite blind to the mean-spirited injustice which had girt me up to fight against it."<sup>15</sup>

Erskine refused to pronounce sentence but remanded Richards and Cooper [Capper and Ellis were already serving a previous sentence] to the Court of the Queen's Bench, under whose jurisdiction they had come when they traversed at the end of the Special Session. Talfourd recommended mercy for the aged Capper, who did not receive any additional sentence. Before leaving the court-room Cooper thanked Judge Erskine on behalf of all the defendants for his patience and courtesy. Both Richards and Cooper were permitted to return home under bail. Released about March 28, they were ordered to appear in London for sentence on May 4.

As to just how Cooper spent the month of April, his last month of freedom, little information is available. But among his papers is a letter written at this time by Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary, to T. S. Duncombe, who forwarded it with his comments to Cooper. The communication is in reference to the Chartist lecturer and agitator William Jones, who was arrested at Cooper's house in August of the previous year, tried at the Leicester As-

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<sup>14</sup> *Northern Star*, April 8 1843.

<sup>15</sup> Preface to *Purgatory of Suicides*.

sizes,<sup>16</sup> and sentenced to imprisonment for six months as "a misdemeanant of the second division." Graham had been requested to transfer the prisoner to the first division, *i. e.* from the classification of criminal to that of political prisoner. In his note to Cooper, Duncombe declared that he did not agree with Graham that the Judge alone had power to decide in which division the prisoner should be placed, and he asked Cooper to send him a correct report of the trial, and also to advise him whether Graham's recommendation that the prisoner's diet should be improved was actually being carried out. Cooper himself was to memorialize Duncombe a few weeks later with regard to his own harsh treatment in prison.

Mrs. Cooper was at this time dangerously ill, "worn almost to a skeleton, always in bed, and incapable of helping herself."<sup>17</sup> Her illness seems to have resulted from a miscarriage which occurred during her early married life, and brought about her semi-invalid condition for the rest of her days.<sup>18</sup> The strain of her husband's two trials, and the shock of his final conviction sapped the last of her resistance, and Cooper states that when he parted from her at the time of his going up to London for sentence he never expected to see her alive again. Undoubtedly he spent a good portion of his few days of freedom at the bedside of the invalid, to whom he was deeply attached.

For his participation in the Manchester conference Cooper had been included in an indictment on nine different points which was issued against "Feargus O'Connor and fifty-eight others." He was not required to appear

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<sup>16</sup> For an account of Jones's trial, and the extraordinary conduct of the Judge, Baron Gurney, conduct which the *Morning Chronicle* declared "shocked every received notion of judicial decorum," see Gammage, R. G. *Op. cit.* pp. 247-249.

<sup>17</sup> *Life*, p. 232.

<sup>18</sup> Based on statements made to me by Mrs. Ash in 1929. In answer to my request for more specific details, the faithful old servant declared that in Mrs. Cooper's day such topics were not considered suitable for discussion. However, in 1931 Mr. Cecil Radford, of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Chapel, Lincoln, wrote me: "There was one child born to Thomas Cooper by his wife, but it did not survive birth. This was, I understand, one of the causes for Mrs. Cooper's ill health for the rest of her life."

at the trial, which took place at Lancaster, in March, but was one of the thirty-one defendants who were convicted —convictions afterwards set aside on technical grounds,<sup>19</sup> a result apparently deliberately brought about by the prosecution. Cooper declared that he learned he had been included in the Lancaster trial only when a double summons was served upon him, one for the Lancaster and the other for the Stafford conviction.<sup>20</sup>

Before going up to London in obedience to these summons to judgment, Cooper delivered two farewell addresses to the Shakespereans, the first on Sunday, April 30, and the other the following night. Arriving in London on May 2, he addressed the Marylebone Chartists at the Socialist headquarters in John Street, a platform on which he was to appear many times in the years after his release.

A letter written a few days before he left Leicester contains the following description of his feelings on the eve of his imprisonment:

I go up to judgment with the calmest satisfaction, and with the feeling that I shall be honoured indeed by suffering for the cause of truth. I have but one sorrowful thought; it is that I leave my beloved wife in so prostrate a condition that I cannot expect to see her again in this world.<sup>21</sup>

This valedictory letter concluded with the information that "his excellent Wednesbury friends proposed committing the care of their girls' school, when their new hall was finished, to dear Mrs. Ellis." He also advised that upon reaching London he would "impress poor Ellis's case once more on Mr. Duncombe's mind," and stated that he had handed over his memoir of Ellis to Cleave, who, as we have seen, published it in the *English Chartist Circular*. Cooper cor-

<sup>19</sup> The whole proceedings were finally quashed on the ground that the indictment did not specify the locality of the alleged offense. See Slosson, P. W., *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* (Columbia University Studies in History, etc., lxxiii, No. 2, N. Y. 1916) p. 79; and, for a full report, *The Trial of Feargus O'Connor and 58 Others at Lancaster*, 1843.

<sup>20</sup> *Northern Star*, April 29, 1843.

<sup>21</sup> *Northern Star*, April 29, 1843.

rectly describes it as "very meagre," and declared it would have been finished sooner had he received the materials for its composition more quickly.<sup>22</sup>

On May 4, along with O'Connor, Harney, Leach, Bairstow, and others Cooper appeared at the Queen's Bench, and with the other defendants was bound in one hundred pounds to keep the peace and appear when summoned, after which they were all dimissed.

The next day Cooper was rearraigned, together with Richards, in the same court. Their judge on this occasion was Lord Chief Justice Thomas Denman, who first achieved prominence in 1820 as one of the defending counsel for Queen Caroline. Being permitted to address the court to plead for mitigation of sentence, Cooper, who spoke first, began by reading an affidavit consisting of several pages of "printed proofs," principally extracts from the League's *Anti-Bread Tax Circular*. Denman brusquely interrupted its reading to observe that "he hoped the affidavit did not contain much matter of that kind, because it did not bear any application to the case \* \* \* and the Court could not permit libels against others who were not present."<sup>23</sup> Cooper replied that he "felt it hard that they as working men should be indicted while those who were great in the land were allowed to go free. \* \* \* If the affidavit was not read he should feel it to be unjust. They were \* \* \* perpetually interrupted at Stafford [but] they did not expect such treatment in this court." Lord Denman answered that he "thought that would have led them to expect it." Upon Cooper's repeating that "persons in authority \* \* \* had not been prosecuted by the Government, while the working men had been indicted," the Chief Justice replied "that if he chose to put forward a general statement to that effect there would be no objection," but that the affidavit, which Cooper described as a series of extracts designed to show that the Corn Law repealers were responsible for the riots, was merely a libel on other

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Star*, May 13, 1843.

parties not before the Court, and not permissible in its present form upon the records of the Court. Cooper replied that under such conditions he could not defend himself, and might as well sit down at once. "Sit down then," rejoined the Chief Justice, "if you don't choose to address the Court in mitigation; we give you the opportunity if you think proper."<sup>24</sup>

He spoke with such severity and haughty harshness that the emotional prisoner burst into tears. "My lord," he said in a broken voice, "is that worthy of yourself—of the name of Denman? I cannot address the Court if your lordship speaks to me in that manner. Will you allow John Richards to go on, and let me address the Court when he has done?"<sup>25</sup>

This request being granted, Richards stepped forward. His speech is thus described by Cooper:

The old man had fine native powers, and spoke with a little stateliness that was very becoming to a white-headed, large-foreheaded man of three-score and ten. He told the Court that he had learned his first lesson in patriotism and politics from the Rt. Hon. Charles James Fox and the Rt. Hon. William Pitt. He gave a really clever sketch of the progress of opinion and politics during his own time, strongly set forth the broken promises of the Whig ministry and its supporters, and argued well for the People's Charter; in conclusion telling the Lord Chief Justice to his face that his lordship's doings in the past had greatly helped the progress of Chartism.

"My lords," said the fine old man, "I have spent my life in the good old cause of freedom, and I believe still that it will prevail. I am seventy years old; but I shall live to see the People's Charter become the law of the land yet."<sup>26</sup>

At the conclusion of Richards' speech Cooper resumed his plea, speaking from one o'clock to five. He began by reiterating that he and Richards had erred

if they had erred at all by following a precedent set them by the Anti-Corn Law League, and tolerated by the Government. He knew that it had been observed by the Judges that the conduct of the

<sup>24</sup> *Northern Star*, May 13, 1843, which under the heading "Sentences of the Chartist" gave a six column summary of the Court's procedure.

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, p. 234.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, pp. 234-235.

Anti-Corn Law League was no justification of his aged friend and himself; if the League broke the law, it gave no right to others to do the same \* \* \* But \* \* \* his friend and himself argued that they were following the example of men in office, and they must be keeping the law, not breaking it \* \* \* They could not lose sight of the fact that a large number of persons who were wealthy and substantial had used language far stronger than that used by himself or his friend, and that those persons were still at large \* \* \* They had read criticism upon the government in the \* \* \* *Chronicle*, the *Globe*, and other papers in which the language was far more inflammable than any they had used.<sup>27</sup>

He complained also that he was to be punished "on the evidence of vagabonds, perjurors, and men of the most depraved characters." Serjeant Talfourd had taunted him with vanity because he had stated that he could read the New Testament in the original Greek, but he thought that was a subject on which any man might be allowed to be vain.<sup>28</sup>

After speaking for about four hours until it was late in the afternoon, he requested that the continuation of the hearing be adjourned until the following day, as he was too exhausted to continue. But Lord Dentman eyed him "with cruel archness \* \* \* and with a grim mocking smile said, 'We mean to hear you out tonight.' "<sup>29</sup> His design of prolonging the proceedings another day being thus fore stalled, Cooper resumed, and concluded his address after another hour and a half. In his peroration he dwelt upon the necessity and justification of Chartism. Whatever sentence might be pronounced against him, his faith in the principles of democracy would remain unshaken. All efforts of the Government to put down democratic feeling would be in vain. The schoolmaster was abroad; light was dawning in every corner of the kingdom. The people thought it wrong that they should be compelled to work as they did to pamper those who did not work, and who tyrannized over them. Let the Government become father-

<sup>27</sup> *Northern Star*, May 13, 1843.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, p. 235.

ly, and the protectors of the country, and a change would take place in the minds of the working class. But if the present evil system of government continued, his Lordship must not think this would be the last time a Chartist would be brought before him for judgment. And the only effect of even a hundred trials and sentences would be to increase the energies and strengthen the convictions of the Chartists. If he were sentenced to a dungeon, the first breath of heaven which he drew on his release should be expended in proclaiming liberty and the Charter.<sup>30</sup>

Serjeant Talfourd was the first of the counsel for the Crown to address the Court. He said that his case against Cooper was that he had watched his opportunity, and when he saw that the distress of the poverty-stricken multitude was making them rebellious, he made speeches relative to the People's Charter in order that he might divert the passions of the people into the forcible obtaining of the Charter. He could not conceive how any man who had passed a resolution to the effect that workingmen were forcibly to be turned out, and that no one was to be permitted to work until the Charter was obtained, could ask for mitigation of punishment. If such a proposition was advocated by the defendant, and it was proved that it had been, then, he maintained, Cooper was guilty of an overt act of high treason.

Sir William Follett, the Solicitor-General, who had headed the prosecution at the first trial, next addressed the Court, having been called in from the House of Commons. He asked that leniency be shown towards Richards because of his advanced age, but pointing at Cooper, said with an austere look, "This man is the chief author of the violence that occurred, and I conjure your lordships to pass a severe sentence on the prisoner Cooper."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Northern Star*, May 13, 1843.

<sup>31</sup> Preface to the *Purgatory of Suicides*. In this same place Cooper wrote regarding Sir William Follett: "Scarcely three years have passed, and the great lawyer is no more. He wronged me, but I think of him with no vindictive feeling, for my imprisonment has opened to me a nobler source of satisfaction than he could ever de-

Sentence was pronounced by Sir John Patteson, whose prominent "hearing-horns," for he was deaf,<sup>32</sup> greatly interested the prisoners. Sir John took some pains to answer Cooper's argument that the Chartist were punished for opinions less subversive than those of the Anti-Corn Law League, pointing out that Cooper had not proved any connection between the activities of the League and the riotous actions of the Hanley mob. He admitted that the passages which Cooper had read, and the language which he showed had been used on various occasions, was of a very strong, inflammatory, and wicked description, and he would not hesitate to say that if persons had been guilty of using that language deliberately and intentionally, no doubt they had committed a serious offense, for which they could be severely punished, and it might be that they ought to be brought before the Court; but as the League was not on trial the Court could not recognize that such things had taken place.<sup>33</sup> At the conclusion of his remarks Patteson sentenced Richards to Stafford Gaol for one year, and Cooper to the same prison for two years.<sup>34</sup>

rive from all his honours. He amassed wealth, but the *Times*. alluding to the 'frequent unhappy disappointments' occasioned by Sir William's non-attendance on cases he undertook to plead, says— 'So often did they occur that solicitors and clients, in the agony of disaster and defeat were in the habit of saying that Sir William often took briefs when he must have known that he could not attend in court: and as barristers never return fees, the suitor sometimes found that he had lost his money and missed his advocate at a time when he could badly spare either.' I am poor, and have been plunged into more than two hundred pounds' debt by the persecution of my enemies; but I have the consolation to know that my course was dictated by heart-felt zeal to relieve the sufferings and oppressions of my fellow-men. He was entombed with pomp, and a host of titled great ones, of every shade of party, attended the laying of his clay in the grave; and they purpose now to erect a monument to his memory. Let them build it: the self-educated shoemaker has also reared his:—and despite its imperfections, he has a calm confidence that, though the product of poverty and suffering and wrong, it will outlast the posthumous stone block that may be erected to perpetuate the memory of the titled lawyer."

<sup>32</sup> Deafness at length compelled Patteson to tender his resignation, in 1852.

<sup>33</sup> *Northern Star*, May 18, 1843.

<sup>34</sup> "The *Ash Box* contains a copy of Cooper's sentence, dated 'Friday, the fifth day of May, in the sixth year of the Reign of Queen Victoria.'

Cooper instantly sprang up to ask for "literary privileges" during his confinement, such as had been allowed him during his eleven weeks' confinement awaiting trial and the completion of his bail bond. Such privileges of composition had been accorded to Lovett and Collins after six months of terrible hardship, and their little book *Chartism* was the result. O'Connor, too, had been allowed to beguile his term in York Castle by writing for the *Northern Star*. Cooper wished to obtain similar opportunities to write and study. The prison chaplain had warned him when he was released on bail that *convicted* prisoners could have nothing but the Bible and Prayer Book to read, and were not allowed to write or receive letters, or to have the use of pen, ink, and paper. After being sentenced, therefore, Cooper immediately requested that he be allowed the same privileges as he had previously enjoyed. But Denman declared that he had "no control over the rules of any gaol in the kingdom," and peremptorily bade the prisoner to stand down.<sup>35</sup>

While being detained in the Queen's Bench Prison, where he remained a week before being transferred to Stafford, Cooper met Richard Oastler the Poor Law agitator. Oastler, who was occupying the "state-room" of the prison, was so kind as to write Lord Kenyon, asking him to "intercede with Lord Denman and get him to express his wish to the Stafford magistrates that [Cooper] should be allowed the literary privileges [he] had asked for."<sup>36</sup> But again Denman sternly denied the request. During the wakeful miserable night preceding his removal to Stafford, Cooper passionately resolved that he

would break down the system of restraint in Stafford Gaol, and win the privilege of reading and writing, or end my life in the struggle. I thought I should never see my dear wife again: she would die before I left the prison, and so I need not be careful of my life on her account. And if I could not write the poem on which I believed my whole future on earth depended—if it were to be

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<sup>35</sup> *Life*, p. 236.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

honorable—it was not worth enduring two years' dismal and unrelieved imprisonment, to come out in rags and with a ruined constitution.<sup>37</sup>

With regard to the justice of his sentence, Cooper expressed himself, a few months after its expiration, as follows:

I make no doubt that many will be disposed still to think and say that however far I might be from intending to excite violence, since violence followed my address it was but just that I have suffered for it. I beg to say, however, that I hold a very contrary opinion. If an Englishman excites his wronged fellow-countrymen to a legal and constitutional course [and Lord Chief Justice Tindal told the Stafford jury that now the old Combination Act was abolished it was perfectly legal and constitutional for men to agree to cease labour until the People's Charter became the law], it is surely not the person who so excites them that ought to be held responsible for the violence they may commit under an enraged sense of wrong, but the *Government who wrongs them*. I appeal to Englishmen of all shades of politics whether this is not the judgment we pass on all fortunate revolutions that have occurred in our history.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Life*, p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> Preface to the *Purgatory of Suicides*.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PRISON EXPERIENCE

When after his week of detention in London Cooper was returned to Stafford Gaol, he found that his treatment was to be little different from that accorded to convicted felons. He and Richards at first were allowed a common sleeping-room, but were soon separated and assigned to individual cells. These cubicles, and the daily regimen, Cooper described as follows:

Each [cell] had a stone floor, [and] was simply long enough to hold a bed, and broad enough for one to walk by the side of it. An immense slab of cast iron formed the bedstead, and it rested on two large stones. A bag stuffed so hard with straw that you could scarcely make an impression on it with your heel formed the bed. Two blankets and a rug completed the furniture. There was no pillow, but remembering this from my former imprisonment I had brought with me a small Mackintosh pillow, which I could blow up and put under my head. The best thing I had was a very large and very heavy camlet traveling cloak. If I had not brought this with me I could not have slept in that cell during the winter without becoming a cripple \* \* \* or losing my life.

The prison-bell rang at half-past five, and we were expected to rise and be ready to descend into the day-yard at six. At eight they brought us a brown porringer full of "skilly,"—for it was such bad unpalatable oatmeal gruel that it deserved the name. At twelve at noon they unlocked the door of our day-room and threw upon the deal table a netful of boiled potatoes in their skins, and a paper of salt—for dinner. At five in the evening they brought us half a porringerful of "skilly," but no bread. At six we were trooped off, and locked up in our cells for the next twelve hours.<sup>1</sup>

Against these intolerable conditions Cooper at once began a campaign of rebellion. Managing one afternoon

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, pp. 237-238. George Jacob Holyoake had suffered similarly during his imprisonment of the previous year for "blasphemy." In one gaol two Chartist prisoners died because of the bad conditions.

to slip past the turnkey who conducted him and Richards to their cells, he reached the door of the apartment of the warden [or "governor" as Cooper calls him], upon which he was executing a vigorous tattoo when the guards caught up with him. The governor came out to investigate the noise, and learning of the prisoners' complaint against their daily fare ordered that they be allowed an addition of bread and butter and a cup of coffee. He also complied with Cooper's demand to see the magistrates, but when he met these officials they refused his request for access to his books, and confirmed the prison rule that he could neither write nor receive letters—even from his wife. In order to obtain these privileges Cooper upon being returned to the jail began a systematic campaign against its officials, pounding for hours on his cell door, calling repeatedly for the surgeon and governor, and smashing windows. Learning that the former practice of locking up obnoxious prisoners in a grated box when they attended chapel had been discontinued, Cooper went to service one Sunday morning, and from his seat near the door pounced upon the terrified chaplain as he entered, crying out, "If you are a minister of Christ, see me righted!"<sup>2</sup> Of course he was forcibly removed from the room, and for some time afterwards, as a result of the violence of his emotions, he lay ill and exhausted. On another occasion he assaulted the door of his day-room with a long wooden bench, at the same time shouting "Murder!" at the top of his lungs. For this he was locked up in solitary confinement, and returned to his cell supperless.

Despite these strenuous attempts at rebellion he would probably have been unsuccessful in his attempts to improve his hard lot had not the illness which followed his last violent outbreak brought about an opportunity for him to communicate with the world outside the prison walls. As he was lying on the hard slab in his cell sick and dispirited, he heard one of the prisoners who had been sweeping the

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<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 241.

creep up to his cell door and whisper through the "Master Kewper! dooant yo know me? My John Smith. I cum thrum th' Potteries; and I o speak that day upo' th' Craan Bonk. Dun yo t?"<sup>3</sup> When Cooper demanded what he was doing orridor, and how he could help him, the whispered me back, "Why we've getten lagged,<sup>4</sup> yo see; and ten us to sweep th' passages and th' cells till we go e can get you owt you like throo th' debtors.<sup>5</sup> a chink i' th' wall where we get things through." dance with whispered instructions Cooper there-  
rust two shillings under the door with instructions oe laid out in the procuring of writing materials. t morning he again remained in his cell, and the ie had requested were brought to him as promised. loyed the large sheet of paper he had ordered, to p a petition to the House of Commons, and the sheet for two letters, one to the *Northern Star* and r to Mr. Duncombe. These he left under his mat-  
nd the next morning his humble admirer, while ; his cell, secreted them, and afterwards had them ed out of the prison. The Chartist sympathizer warded them wrote to the editor of the *Star*:

letter was conveyed to me by "sleight-of-hand" with an-  
e \* \* \*. From what I hear and see in the other letter,  
hat should he remain two years in this monstrous hell,  
ed by tyrants such as the present turnkeys are, he will  
stark mad—or dead—ere the time has expired.<sup>6</sup>

ed account of Cooper's assaults upon the governor's  
d upon the person of the chaplain followed. With  
to the latter the writer states that

was at last carried out of the chapel *raging stark mad*,  
subsequently placed in the "black hole," from which they

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oper defines this term as meaning "sentenced to transpor-

<sup>3</sup>e, p. 243.

prisonment for debt was not abolished in England until

*Northern Star*, May 27, 1843.

were soon forced to release him, his cries and lunges (?) were so awful. Immediately two doctors visited him, and they were very kind to him, and recommended that he have milk, butter, a quarter of pound of animal food daily, etc., while the governor went to Sir James Graham to know what was to be done. This "struggle" has nearly cost him his life. He is now so ill that he cannot sit without an arm chair, and complains of violent pains in the head and back. I suppose they mean to drive him *mad* and *murder* him.'

Cooper's own letter, which was enclosed, read as follows:

Stafford Gaol, Wednesday, May 17, 1843

Dear Hill:

They are murdering me! Skilly, potatoes—rotten ones, too—and blue bread \* \* \* to live on. I am sure I was nearly mad yesterday, and could not forbear shouting "Murder." No books—no writing! My poor wife, I fear is dead, for they will not tell me a syllable! For God's sake alarm—alarm! This is a stolen letter. They will not let me petition.<sup>8</sup>

Even before the publication of this appeal efforts were being made on Cooper's behalf. At Manchester "Commodore" Mead, at the close of his Sunday evening lecture of May 21, obtained the unanimous adoption of a petition to the House of Commons stating that "the said Thomas Cooper and John Richards would, by the assistance of their friends, be enabled to purchase their own food, but have been strictly prohibited from doing so by parties having management of the prison,"<sup>9</sup> and praying for an amelioration of their hard condition. Similar petitions were adopted the following day at Leicester and Sheffield. All three documents were forwarded to Duncombe for presentation to the House. The following week George White wrote a fiery epistle from Queens Prison, Southwark, in the course of which he urged that petitions be forwarded from "every town and village in the kingdom." Apparently the only city which re-

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Northern Star*, June 3, 1843. The Commodore was also inspired to a thirteen stanza poetic effusion on the treatment of the Stafford prisoners which was published in full in the issue of the *Star* for the following week.

nded to this appeal was Liverpool, where a public meet-  
· was held early in June for the purpose of petitioning  
t Richards and Cooper be transferred from Stafford  
Queen's Prison.

The petition which Cooper himself had drawn up with  
aid of the smuggled writing materials, and which he  
ced in the hands of the astonished governor with the  
and that it be forwarded immediately, is officially sum-  
rized in the published proceedings of the House of  
nmons. as follows:

The Petitioner states that he is undergoing a two year im-  
onment in Stafford Gaol, where he is compelled to subsist on  
real gruel, potatoes, and coarse bread; that he is not permit-  
to purchase his own food, is denied the use of pen, ink, and  
r, and is neither allowed books nor correspondence; he com-  
is that his health has materially suffered in consequence of  
severity of his treatment, and prays the House to procure  
him some amelioration of it.<sup>10</sup>

Cooper had forwarded petitions for Richards and Cap-  
as well as himself, and on June 9 Duncombe presented  
three documents to the House,<sup>11</sup> stating that they had  
signed on May 22 and instructions given that they  
e to be forwarded at once to him, but that the gaoler  
kept them back for fifteen days. He wished to inquire  
he Chair whether a breach of the privileges of the  
se had not been committed by the parties detaining the  
tions. The Speaker replied in the negative, but stated  
ad no doubt the detention of the petitions was an inter-  
nence with the rights of subjects. Upon Hume's inquiry  
t remedy was to be had, the Speaker said that Dun-  
be might make a motion about the matter if he liked.  
r Roebuck and Baring, both Radicals, had supported  
combe's protest, the matter was dropped.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Reports of the Select Committee of the House \* \* \* on Public  
ions, 1843, xxxii, 9 June, 1843—1815.

<sup>11</sup> Hansard, 3rd ser., lxix, 1298 mentions the presentation of the  
petitions forwarded by Cooper, but does not give any account  
e discussion between Duncombe and the Speaker cited below.

<sup>12</sup> Times, June 10, 1843.

A few days later the governor of the prison informed Cooper that the magistrates wished to see him, and told him that if he were respectful he would get everything he had asked for. At the meeting Duncombe's letter to Cooper was read to him by the Reverend Arthur Talbot, brother of the Earl of Talbot. In this communication, after stating that the Speaker had declared that the detaining of the petition of a political prisoner for nearly a fortnight was neither right nor constitutional, Duncombe tactfully added that "he did not wish to make any harsh observations: he simply thought [Cooper's] requests were so reasonable that the magistrates would deem it right to comply with them."<sup>13</sup>

The magistrates declared that Cooper's bad conduct had caused them to detain his petition, but as the result of better feeling on the present occasion they granted its requests. The prison surgeon was authorized to allow such food as was necessary for the prisoners' health; letters were permitted to pass once a week between Cooper and his wife, subject to examination by prison officials; and he was allowed to use his books and to proceed with the writing of his poem, after his portmanteau had been inspected and two books on political subjects confiscated.<sup>14</sup> This box of books, which he had left at the prison at the conclusion of his eleven weeks of imprisonment at the time of his first trial, had previously been taken away. One of the turnkeys had demanded the key of the box, and when Cooper refused to give it up, threatened to take it from him by force. "Try to if you dare," was the pugnacious rejoinder; "if you attempt it I'll knock your teeth down your throat."<sup>15</sup> Though Cooper's short stature might have

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<sup>13</sup> *Life*, p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Among the books so jealously guarded were a Shakespeare and a Milton (how complete he does not say), Chambers' *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, and some classical texts. Later he also obtained *Childs Harold*, "the small pirated edition of Shelley," White's *Natural History of Shelburne*, *Don Quixote* in Jarvis's translation, and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 287.

made this threat a difficult one for him to carry out, his evident resolution overawed the keeper, and he was left unmolested.

The improved rations, in which Capper and Richards shared, included coffee, sugar, butter, rice, and a quarter pound of meat daily, though this last was of such a sameness, and of such inferior quality, that the prisoners grew to loathe it. The drinking water was beyond the surgeon's power to improve. It came from the pump in the day-yard, and was "so bad," Cooper records, "that we had to let the bucket stand a long time that all the unmentionable stuff might settle to the bottom."<sup>16</sup>

Another privilege of the greatest importance so far as his literary composition was concerned was that of being allowed to remain in the day-room until nine o'clock instead of being sent to the sleeping cells at six. Cooper was also allowed to purchase candles, so that he might continue reading or writing until it was time to retire. An arm-chair was also allowed in the day-room so that Cooper might work at the table while his two elderly fellow-prisoners sat on the bench by the fire. The room where they spent the hours when released from their cells did not, however, afford any great degree of comfort, for the floor was of stone slabs, and the wind entered on all sides, so that "it was," Cooper says, "a place to create tooth-ache and neuralgia daily."<sup>17</sup>

The Reverend Arthur G. O'Neill of Birmingham,<sup>18</sup> who arrived at Stafford Prison on August 12, 1843, to serve a

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> "The Church at Birmingham, the best known and the most famous of the Chartist Churches, was run on purely voluntary lines by Arthur O'Neill and John Collins, with occasional visits from Henry Vincent and others. It consisted of a political association which studied democratic thought as laid down in the works of Cobbett, Hunt, Paine, and Cartwright, and a Church whose purpose was to further temperance, morality, and knowledge. It had schools for children and for young men, and a sick club. O'Neill seems to have had no little success in the Birmingham area. An iron master in the district allowed him the use of a large room 'which was

sentence of a year's imprisonment for his encouragement of the Plug Plot, was also allowed the use of his books, and from him Cooper borrowed a number of volumes on church history and similar subjects. During his imprisonment Cooper also read the *Aeneid* and the *Commentaries* of Caesar in Latin, and a little volume of tales in German. He had, too, "copies of the New Testament in several languages," <sup>19</sup> and in these he and O'Neill read every morning for an hour or two. In a letter written to a Lincoln friend during January 1844 it is doubtless to this reading which he refers when he says:

I am going through the Hebrew Bible here, and am reading the Testament in Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch, and English.<sup>20</sup>

The Hebrew Bible he mentions was a fine old copy which had been printed in Germany, a souvenir of the days of its owner's employment by the London bookseller Lumley. Cooper had also amongst his books a copy of Gesenius' Hebrew lexicon. His revival of interest in this language while he was in prison speedily developed into one of those fits of furious enthusiasm to which he was so liable. He read nothing, thought of nothing but Hebrew for some three months, during which he worked continuously at copying and classifying conjugations and working out declension paradigms, with a view to committing everything to memory. He went through two-thirds of the Old Testament during the quarter of a year that the frenzy lasted; but everything else was sacrificed to the mad infatuation—his poem was at a standstill. Finally, when such severe application began to affect his health O'Neill took the drastic step of temporarily confiscating all his

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crowded to suffocation every Sabbath afternoon.' \* \* \* O'Neill was an opponent of insurrectionary methods, so that the Bible did not in his hands become the explosive force which Stephens had made it. He was, however, prominent in all local industrial movements; in the strike of the colliers in 1842 he was one of the men's spokesmen, thus carrying out his own precepts even to the dungeon itself." Hovell, M., *Op. cit.*, pp. 200-202.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, May 11, 1929.

Hebrew books. This effected a cure, and Cooper was so afraid of a renewal of the obsession that he declares he never while he was in prison returned heartily to a study of the language, although after his release he projected for a time a popular treatise on the language to be entitled *Hebrew for the Million*.

Some interesting side-lights upon the prison experience are reflected from the pages of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, the long poem in ten books<sup>21</sup> of Spenserian stanzas which Cooper composed during his imprisonment. We have seen that he commenced this poem during his first eleven weeks' imprisonment, and originally planned to write it in blank verse. When "literary privileges" were finally granted to him he entered at once upon the task of completing this long-projected work. While still denied access to his books and papers, and so unable to refer to his only copy of the opening lines, he began to compose mentally, committing the stanzas to memory as fast as they were completed. The date of his beginning this unwritten composition was "on the night of the 10th of June, 1843, when [he relates]

I felt suddenly empowered to make a start, and when I composed the four opening lines I found they rhymed alternately. It was pure accident, for I always purposed to write my poem in blank verse. Now, however, I resolved to try the Spenserian stanza. So I struck off two stanzas that night; they are the two opening stanzas of my poem; and they are the first Spenserian stanzas I ever wrote in my life. The remembrance that Byron had shown the stanza of the "Faery Queene" to be capable of as much grandeur and force as the blank verse of "Paradise Lost", while he also demonstrated that it admits the utmost freedom that can be needed for the treatment of a grave theme, determined me to abide by the Spenserian stanza.

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<sup>21</sup> Vide Williams, Stanley T., *Studies in Victorian Literature* N. Y., 1923, p. 180 for a curious reference to the *Purgatory of Suicides* as "a monstrous work of twelve volumes in Spenserian stanzas." This should be, of course, ten "books" or cantos, which in the James Watson edition are of sufficiently small bulk to slip into the ordinary coat pocket.

When I obtained the use of writing materials at the end of those two months of struggle, I very soon had a fair copy of the perhaps thirty stanzas I had by that time composed.<sup>22</sup>

The writing of this long, disjointed, and very unequal poem, three quarters prophetic vision and one-fourth musings upon contemporary conditions and religious doubt, "employed a great part of [his] thought and absorbed some mental effort of almost every day spent in Stafford Gaol,"<sup>23</sup> except for the three months of mad infatuation with Hebrew. Because of his constant preoccupation with its composition, Cooper's poem includes several references to the circumstances of his prison life, both in the poem itself, and in the notes he appended to each book. The first such note at the end of Book VI records that:

Six human beings underwent capital punishment in front of Stafford Gaol during the two years I remained in it. The entire procedure in any one instance, of course, I could not witness; on one occasion only,—when on account of the early hour and season of the year I had not been removed from my night cell,—I beheld the grim preface to the legal butchery. Without repeating the testimonies of reflecting men who have attended executions as to the hardening effect of these savage spectacles, I will just observe that while the sound of the death-bell for the first execution filled me and my fellow-prisoners with paroxysms of distress, on the second, third, and fourth occasions, we became comparatively unconcerned, and when I was left a solitary prisoner, the sound of the death-bell for the last time, created a few bitter thoughts of the abhorrent and uncivilized nature of the impending tragedy, but a kind of careless disgust followed from the instant reflection that all *my* dislike of the brutal transaction was vain. And, within ten minutes after the death-bell had ceased, I caught myself humming "The Banks and Braes o' bonny Doon!" Now a more sensitive and excitable human creature than myself, perhaps, does not exist, but there is the honest fact—such as startled me by its strangeness at the time—: let the advocates for the usefulness of capital punishment as "impressive moral lessons" make what they can of it.

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<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 251.  
<sup>23</sup> *Life*, p. 252.

In another place the writer has described what he hears and imagines while lying sleepless under his cloak on the iron slab:

Hark! 'tis Consumption's hollow cough that rings  
From yon damp felon's cell! How dread these vaults  
Of living Death seem 'mid such echoings  
At midnight! What strange doubts the soul assault,—  
What frightful bodings! till the heart's pulse halts  
As if it were afraid to beat so loud!—  
Let me too rest! To-morrow, when the bolts  
Are drawn, once more, this feeling of the shroud  
May flee: the spirit be, again, with hope endowed.<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes the sleepless hours were passed recollecting the lines of *Paradise Lost*. For alleviating the long hours which had to be passed locked up in the night-cell few better anodynes than this recollection of Milton's epic and the composition of his own verses could have been devised. Yet the terrible oppressiveness of this close confinement could not always be shaken off, as the following stanzas testify:

Once more resounds the hateful clang of bars  
And bolts: once more I gain my narrow lair  
\* \* \* (Where) Morrow is the heir  
Legitimate of dull To-day; and where  
Yesterday gazed upon the chill damp wall  
And yawned, To-day looks on with the same air  
Of listlessness. Food, sight, sound, converse pall:  
Only the fountains of the dead <sup>25</sup> well spiritual  
  
Waters that purify the stagnant mind  
From morbid loathings that would madness breed,  
Amid this sickening slough of unrefined  
And vulgar circumstance.<sup>26</sup>

Friends were allowed to visit the imprisoned Chartists only at intervals of six months, so that Cooper saw only Dr. J. B. Simpson of Birmingham, and Bairstow and Tat-

<sup>24</sup> *Purgatory of Suicides*, Book V, st. 25.

<sup>25</sup> A reference to the visions of the dead, which make up the greater part of the *Purgatory of Suicides*.

<sup>26</sup> *Purgatory of Suicides*, sts. 19-20.

low from Leicester, during the two years of his incarceration, a fourth visitor being refused admission when he applied after the quota was exhausted. Bairstow, to whom Cooper had been very generous, proved an ungrateful weakling. He had abandoned his wife, and disappeared, after ruining the business which Cooper had entrusted to him, and embezzling more than half of the funds placed in his hands for the relief of the prisoner's necessities.<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Cooper did not see her husband until after his release. Her health continued so precarious that when, owing to Bairstow's mismanagement, the Church-gate house had to be given up, it was necessary to carry her out of the house. By September of 1844 she had somewhat recovered, however, and there is a record of her attending a Chartist tea at that time. Holyoake, who knew her at this date, describes Mrs. Cooper as "a placid, pleasant, patient, earnest woman [of] delicate health."<sup>28</sup>

A public meeting was held in the Leicester market-place in March 1844 at which George White presented a petition calling for Cooper's immediate release. After a resolution endorsing it had been carried unanimously, the town was canvassed for signatures, and the completed petition forwarded to Mr. Duncombe, but nothing came of it.

During this spring of 1844, when nearly half of his term had been served, Cooper was, according to the *Star*: in tolerable good spirits, but in very reduced and delicate health, his sufferings appearing to have risen chiefly from the extreme cold and damp of his sleeping apartment, which produced fearful rheumatism, especially in his head. Mr. Cooper was supplied by his visitor with several articles of winter apparel, and the Chartists of Stafford have very handsomely supplied him with shoes, and promise to continue doing so during his incarceration.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Life*, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*—1904. Holyoake met Cooper for the first time just after one of the Stafford trials.

<sup>29</sup> *Northern Star*, March 2, 1844.

With the approach of cold weather at the end of this year, apprehensive of the consequences of sleeping another winter on an iron slab covered only by a bag of straw, in a cell where the water trickled down the walls in wet weather, Cooper sought permission to sleep in his day-room, where it would be possible to keep a fire going—at his own expense, of course—all night. The prison governor readily granted the request, saying that he admired Cooper's pluck in fighting against the hard conditions of his imprisonment. If he had not rebelled, the governor told him, he would have suffered the same fate as the Reverend Humphrey Price, sentenced to a year's imprisonment for defending the wretched carpet-weavers of Kidderminster, who was "compelled to go to bed every night at six o'clock, was never allowed the use of a candle, and had to submit to the common dietary of the prison."<sup>30</sup>

The hardest part of the imprisonment for Cooper was the final six months after the last of his fellow-Chartists had been released and he was left

a solitary thrall  
Where stillness like the silence of the shroud  
Pervades both day and night, save where aloud  
Clash bolts and bars, and the shrill curfew tells  
The prisoner must to bed.<sup>31</sup>

It was during these final six months that he received a remarkable offer through the kindly clergyman then acting as Chaplain of the prison, to have all his expenses paid and his entrance facilitated at the University of Cambridge on the condition that he would thenceforth give up politics. Cooper believed that this generous offer originated with Lord Sandon, afterwards Earl of Harrowby, who had been much impressed by Cooper's interest in and knowledge of Hebrew. Although it had "been one of the great yearnings of [his] heart from a boy \* \* \* to go to a University" he felt that he could not "degrade or falsify [himself] by making such a promise," and although the kindly Chap-

<sup>30</sup> *Life*, p. 255.

<sup>31</sup> *Purgatory of Suicides*, Book VIII, st. 23.

tain<sup>32</sup> blamed him for his obstinacy, and, Cooper states, "assured me that all who conversed with me lamented to see me in such a case, and wondered how a man with such a nature and such attainments ever became a Chartist," he could not shake the prisoner's purpose.<sup>33</sup>

As the end of his term drew near Cooper made many plans for future authorship. Under the heading "Memorandum towards the completion of purposed Works" the first page of his Prison Notebook<sup>34</sup> lists the following fifteen titles:

1. Essay on the Kindred Genius of Milton and Handel
2. Essay on the Spenserian Stanza
3. Lives of the Shoemakers
4. The Student of Stamford, a Romance.
5. Salome, a Romance
6. Joe—
7. The Commonwealth
8. History of English Democracy
9. The English Tongue—its spring, stream, tributaries, etc.
10. Hebrew for the Million
11. My own 'Confessions' or Life
12. The Book of Jokton
13. A History of Athens—for the People
14. A Life of Socrates
15. A History of our own Commonwealth—for the People

<sup>32</sup> This was the Reverend Thomas Sedger. He presented Cooper with a valuable copy of Horace *'de Arte Poetica'* before he left the prison, and in the 1870's sent the former prisoner a copy of his translation of Grotius' *de Veritate*. In 1872 Sedger was curate of Bracon Ash, near Norwich—*Life*, p. 257.

<sup>33</sup> *Life*, pp. 255-257. Not all of Cooper's titled visitors were as polite as Lord Sandon. "The behaviour of Earl Ferrers was of a different order. He came one day to the little window in the passage, and looked at me through his quizzing glass. I put on my cap and went close to the window to look at him, with a pair of eyes on flame, and that meant, 'Who are you, you rude rascal?' He dropped his quizzing-glass, and slunk away." *Life*, p. 256

<sup>34</sup> The original of this interesting relic is in the possession of a friend of Mr. Cecil Radford's. In addition to the memorandum of proposed works it contains a recipe for the alleviation of neuralgia, a list of twenty-two museums and galleries in London offering "gratuitous exhibitions," and a list of nearly 300 volumes in the British Museum Library, headed "To remember."

Of these, the beginning of the first essay was commenced on the following page of the Notebook. That part of it relating to Handel's "Messiah" was used afterwards, first in his novel *The Family Feud*, and again in his final volume *Thoughts at Fourscore*. The "Essay on the Spenserian Stanza," fourteen different examples of which are listed in the Notebook, was never written; and the "Lives of the Shoemakers" never advanced beyond a list of thirty-eight names, among them those of Jacob Boehme, Gifford, Holcroft, "Whittier of Boston," and Sir Cloudsley Shovel. For the two historical romances he prepared a brief synopsis, but nothing more. "Salome" was the name, not of the daughter of Herodias, but "of a cottager \* \* \* on the estate of Grey of Grooby who signed the death warrant of Charles I." Among other characters this romance was to introduce the Quaker George Fox, Cromwell, and the Fifth Monarchy men. "Joe"—two chapters of what was to have been an autobiographical novel—was later incorporated in *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*. "The Commonwealth," a proposed dramatic trilogy centering around Hampden, Cromwell, and Sydney, remained a dream; as did the "History of English Democracy," which was to have traced the democratic spirit from British and Roman times through the Heptarchy and Conquest, the Commonwealth and Revolution of 1688, to Pitt's administration, "and thence more deliberately and distinctly to the present time." The proposed treatise on the English Tongue never got beyond a list of dialect words extending through the letter D; but "Hebrew for the Million; or, the way to acquire a language without a master, and to keep it when learnt," was worked out in detail. It never escaped from manuscript, however, as no publisher would consider it. "My own 'Confessions' or Life" was finally written in his sixty-seventh year, and is one of his most interesting works. The "Book of Jokton" was planned to be a romance in Biblical style telling how Jokton and his children [Genesis x:25-30] "should in the East preserve fraternity, equality \* \* \* all-things-common—a state of uni-

versal happiness." It never advanced beyond the introductory pages. The life of Socrates and the histories of Athens and the Commonwealth were afterwards worked out as popular lectures.

Besides the "small Hebrew guide," Cooper completed three works during his imprisonment: a series of simple tales, his long poem, and the final chapters of his historical romance *Captain Cobler*. This last production, which he had commenced before leaving Lincoln, and part of the manuscript of which he had shown to Bulwer-Lytton, was published by James Watson in 1850. The first edition of the *Purgatory of Suicides* was published in 1845 by Jeremiah How, who in the same year also brought out *Wise Saws and Modern Instances* as he entitled the collection of simple tales. These three works the author hoped would prove "keys for unlocking the gates of fortune,"<sup>35</sup> but in this expectation he was destined to be disappointed.

A subscription was started for Cooper's benefit as the end of his prison term approached, but nothing came of it, as O'Connor in a fit of jealousy saw fit to denounce the proposed recipient in the *Northern Star*, "somebody," Cooper writes, "having filled him with the belief that I meant to conspire against him when I got loose."<sup>36</sup> O'Connor afterwards withdrew his hostility, and it was proposed to start the subscription afresh, but Cooper proudly refused to permit it.

Happily a fortnight before the expiration of his sentence he received ten pounds "from a kind friend in London" whom he stated he was not allowed to name.<sup>37</sup> After his release at six o'clock in the morning on May 4, 1843, he used part of this money to buy a new suit of clothes, and a hat. He then set out for London, where he slept that night at the home of his unnamed benefactor.

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<sup>35</sup> *Life*, p. 258.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 271.

<sup>37</sup> A pencil memorandum by the former owner of my copy of the *Life* states that this unnamed benefactor was the Reverend Frederick James Jobson, to whom Cooper dedicated the autobiography.

As the railway train began to bear him away from Stafford on the beautiful May morning of his release, he burst into tears and sobbed with emotions he could not easily subdue as he "saw once more the fields and flowers and God's glorious sun."<sup>88</sup>

He was so ill during the first week of his freedom that he could not leave the house. This natural reaction from the nervous tension of the final months of his imprisonment was only temporary, however. In about a week he was able to set about trying to find a publisher for his prison-rhyme. Before following the adventures attending that search, it seems well to describe that frequently mentioned work, once rather widely read, but which has now almost completely disappeared.

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<sup>88</sup> *Life*, p. 262.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PURGATORY OF SUICIDES

#### a. *Introductory Stanzas*

The arresting title of what Cooper rightly regarded as his *magnum opus* must frequently have aroused expectations which a perusal of the work itself failed to gratify, for it must be confessed that the poem does not fulfil the promise of its lively title. The purgatorial fires flame but fitfully, and the suicides themselves are little more than a gallery of lifeless historical figures who discourse somewhat tediously upon the theme of political freedom. The author succeeds better in illustrating his wide range of reading and unusual erudition than he does in creating memorable characters and devising a well-knit story. From the *Corn Law Rhymes* to the socialistic hymns of William Morris a poetical blight has seemed always to wait upon the song of a political discontent,<sup>1</sup> and the *Purgatory of Suicides* offers no exception to this generalization. Its fervor is an unsatisfactory substitute for melody. The sustained note of indignation and invective rises frequently to shrillness or falls into a harshness which frightens away the genius of poesy. The work also lacks finish, being frequently labored, obscure, and at times even ungrammatical. Passionate rebellion against social injustice, no less than the author's faulty education, rendered him incapable of mastering the technique of his art, a deficiency which has cost him the attention of posterity.

Cooper called his work "a mind-history," and it has been well described as consisting largely of "an impeachment of oppression, a claim of human rights, a denunciation of priestcraft, bad government, Castlereagh, Union

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Elton, O., *A Survey of English Literature*, N. Y., 1927, iv: 95.

workhouses, and slavery black and white." <sup>2</sup> There are also numerous passages expressing the writer's religious scepticism at the time, passages "which were conscientiously permitted to stand by the author after his re-conversion as being part of his actual history." <sup>3</sup>

Each of the ten books of the poem begin with an exordium setting forth the author's personal feelings; and his ideas, hopes, and fears with reference to the condition of England. These introductory stanzas vary in number from nine in the first book to thirty or more in the sixth, seventh, and tenth books. To clarify the story of the visioned suicides, these expressions of personal feeling, which have no connection with the dream proper, will be summarized first.

The work begins with a poetical version of his Hanley speech to the strikers, following which the author describes his bitter thoughts as he lay upon his prison cot. Remembering the miseries of the poor, from the pyramid-building slaves of ancient Pharaoh down to the exploited factory operatives of his own day, he wonders whether life is worth retaining in a world which so teems with evil. Is not he wisest who refuses to endure the spectacle of fraud, force, and folly, and by his own hand seeks the release of death? To cure these thoughts he endeavors to imagine a day when oppression shall be no more, and falling into a fevered slumber is visited by a dream in which the two strands of his troubled thoughts strangely mingle.

At the opening of Book II the writer questions himself. Who is he, "a thrall from humble labour sprung," to claim a place among England's great poems of freedom? How can he hope for success in so degenerate an age? But to the servile world truth in song is never fitly timed. Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, each praised in a separate stanza, were independent of their times. Byron and Shelley did not permit harsh judgments to overawe their "ut-

<sup>2</sup> Chambers *Encyclopædia of Literature*, iii: 377.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

terance of Freedom's fearless shout." Nor must he. A long and enthusiastic encomium of Milton in thirteen stanzas follows. In view of his enthusiastic admiration for *Paradise Lost*, it is not surprising that the influence of Milton's great epic should be everywhere evident in Cooper's poem. The all-pervading nature of this influence, observable in style, diction, and theme, accounts for many of the unfortunate mannerisms of the *Purgatory*.

The first stanza of Book III is a salute to the rising sun which announces the end of the prisoner's confinement to his night cell. The sun's radiant face at first brings recollections of youthful happiness and poetic reverie along the shores of the silver Trent. Memories of his dead mother then visit him, and for several stanzas he pays tribute to her virtues. Musing upon the riddle of death, he wishes that the sun might illumine

that dark captivity  
From whence, released none ever yet returned  
To tell its secrets! <sup>4</sup>

But it is impossible to learn the fate of the soul:

Although ye knock  
At Truth's dark barriers, they will bear the shock  
Till doomsday—if it ever comes! <sup>5</sup>

Death closes all: we shall then enter eternal bliss as Christianity teaches, or should this prove a delusion at least "If we cease to be, why—we shall cease to weep." <sup>6</sup> Yet to him this alternative seems "frigid, bleak, and bare." The sun itself was long regarded as a symbol of resurrection, as the sun-deities of Egypt, Phoenicia, Persia, India, and Mexico prove. Perhaps the Christ story is but another development of this sun myth. Nevertheless the poet looks with reverence upon "the Toiler blest who on the vile cross died," and says plainly:

I love the Galilean; Lord and Christ  
Such goodness I could own.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Purgatory of Suicides*, Book III, st. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* st. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* st. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* st. 23.

But though the New Testament story commands his admiration, and he "would the tale were true," doubts "becloud Truth's foundations." He closes this long introduction with an expression of strong revulsion against the thought of annihilation at death. He would prefer

the Priest's own hell,  
Ay, or a thousand hells, in thought, unshook,  
Rather than Nothingness!<sup>8</sup>

The introduction to Book IV, telling of the visit to the prison of a cheerful robin has been frequently quoted,<sup>9</sup> partly because these stanzas form one of the few unified brief episodes of the poem, and partly because the free-ranging songster and the imprisoned poet present a striking, if obvious, contrast.<sup>10</sup> The poet welcomes "sweet Robin," but chides the bird for deserting cheerful scenes of human happiness to haunt the dreary ramparts of the prison. He urges it to fly away to the expectant children and granddame who eagerly long for its coming,<sup>11</sup> and presents an idealized picture of the vine-covered cottage where it is looked for. But abruptly the musing prisoner bethinks himself that such happy cottages exist no more. Where they once stood, the "Bastille" and gaol now stand; the robin has found the same refuge as thousands of those who in these dark times win their bread with tears. The thought of all the misery of England's weary workers arouses him to fury. "This dear dear land" of Shakespeare's dying Gaunt

Is dear no longer: it's great name affords  
Thoughts but for curses!<sup>12</sup>

In that land where the iron men of Runnymede formerly quelled the tyrant, and the falseness of a Stuart was paid for by his life,

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* st. 24.

<sup>9</sup> See, e. g. Stedman, E. C., *Victorian Poets*, N. Y., 1875.

<sup>10</sup> A contrast employed by Byron also in "The Prisoner of Chillon."

<sup>11</sup> The well-known description in Thomson's *Winter* of the feeding of the robin by the cottagers may have suggested this passage.

<sup>12</sup> Book IV, st. 11.

Men talk of England as of something vile;  
And wish they could forget her, in some far exile!<sup>13</sup>

It is impossible for the poor any longer to provide even crumbs for the robin. The chill breath of want is killing all gentleness and fellowship and love of beauty. The poor have become slaves; if they will not work, their lords decree that they shall be bastilled. "Cowards!" cries out the infuriated poet, "why did you suffer knaves to forge such eunuch fetters? But despairingly he recalls his own mere substantial bonds, only to rouse once more with the vengeful threat:

Well, let me bide my time; and then, atone  
For that *real* crime—the failing to arouse  
Slaves against tyrants—I may, yet, before life closes.<sup>14</sup>

Twilight has now come; it is time for the robin to seek its rest. The prisoner hopes it will return on the morrow, for it prevents his heart from yielding entirely to bitterness. With the coming of night he must return to the deadly monotony of his narrow cell, whose confinement would breed madness were it not for his vision of the assembled suicides.

Book V begins with a sketch of primitive man's terror of the dark, introduced by the Miltonic line, "Hail eldest night! Mother of human fear." The embittered poet wishes that chaos and night had been perpetual; that "man's birth-wail had ne'er been heard;" that light had never mocked wretched humanity. Night is the season for every kind of crime; it is the carnival hour of lecher, pander, and debauched, who prey upon "frail beauty's primal wreck." Night conspires with men of blood to conceal murder until the guilty proof can be hidden away. If the curtain of darkness should suddenly be transformed into a mirror, how many of the pretended virtuous would be exposed! But it is common knowledge that the world is a stage of cheats. Better that men sin with shame,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* st. 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* st. 17.

and that the darkness remain. For the night brings also rest for the starving operative, and happy dreams to the wretched factory child. Upon the factory tyrants he calls down curses; then, with a change of mood, directs his scorn against the faint-hearted workers who submit to intolerable conditions instead of rising with the cry, "Death, or deliverance from our chains." Is there no one to strike a blow for freedom; no modern Wat Tyler to head a new rebellion of the people? Alas, John Frost who sought to strike a blow for them, now languishes in a distant penal isle; Shell is a martyr; Ellis transported. Such is now the fate of those who seek to improve the miserable state of the worker. Repentantly he calls back his hasty curses. The exploited factory slaves need in their suffering no rebuke from him; all are hastening to an early grave. Let them discard all hope; for them redemption's path is barred. All that is left is for them to drudge on until released by death. This being a Christian age, they will be allowed to die "humanely slow." In the grave they will, at least, no longer suffer the pangs of starvation.

The description of an execution in the jail-yard, which we have noticed in the preceding chapter, forms the introduction to Book VI. The onlooking prisoner weeps over the barbarity of man to man down through the ages. But such barbarity will continue so long as humanity is guided by passion instead of by reason. A church which justifies capital punishment does not believe that Christ meant what he said about mercy and forgiveness. By its teaching of the doctrine of submission, too, the church has made itself the ally of tyrants. The priest with his threat of eternal punishment is able to subdue minds unaffrighted by gallows, flame, or sword. Jesus departed from the old law of an eye for an eye in which he had been reared. His patient endurance of pain and suffering was more miraculous than any alleged divine birth; his godlike spirit of forgiveness, if human, proved that there is a glorious no-

bility enwoven in man. With Godwinian exaltation of the reason Christ's forgiving cry, "They know not what they do," is declared to show plainly that man errs because of ignorance:

His errors accidental; not inwrought  
By natural vice, nor willed in Reason's spite,  
When knowledge shows the wrong.<sup>15</sup>

Can such horrors as "the worm deathless and sateless," and "flame by miracle made eternal" sow the germ of love in man? Yet, as the priest points out, according to the New Testament, Christ preached this hell.<sup>16</sup> The poet admits that his adversary reads "the puzzle book" more skilfully than he. But to the Church's declaration that man must love God or be punished by an everlasting death he replies, "How can I love what doth outvie all tyrannies in horribleness of wrath?" He has followed with wonder and admiration each step of Christ's teaching, but from "that most enslaving of all slavish thoughts," the doctrine that eternal punishment awaits all who dare rebel against entrenched tyranny or orthodox religion, he recoils in horror. Christ's repetition of this ancient superstition merely proves that he too was unable "to burst the spell of circumstance," whose seal binds even the mightiest in impotence; an echo of Robert Owen's teaching which Cooper was to emphasize repeatedly before his conversion. But Christ's wonderful teaching of love and brotherhood, the poet believes, will continue to sustain all noble spirits until blood and force have been driven from the earth. The ancient Saxons, he has heard, abandoned their idols "to worship Whom they called 'the Good.'" The fancifulness of this etymology of *God* is acknowledged in an appended note, where Cooper lists the analogues of this word in the Persian, Gothic, Tartar, Russian, Turkish, Malay, and Cey-

<sup>15</sup> Book VI, st. 18.

<sup>16</sup> In the correspondence which Kingsley initiated with Cooper after the appearance of the *Purgatory*, many pages are devoted to discussion of the troublesome texts referred to in this part of the poem. Like Maurice, Kingsley rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment.

lonese languages.<sup>17</sup> A spider with a fly recalls to his mind the problems of suffering and evil. Every hour the living book of nature sets forth cruelty and pain. Since it seems decreed that life must consist of "things of greed and things to be their prey," the priest urges that man must take refuge in faith. But the poet's freedom-loving spirit rejects such a doctrine—his only faith is "Wrong to eschew, and Right to treasure in the heart's recess." Yet he, too, in the past has known the ecstasy of religious fervor; as well as passionate zeal in the search for truth and knowledge. From it all he has come to a single conclusion—"Goodness alone is worshipful." He sums up his credo in the italicized line, "I cannot worship what I cannot love." He does not say "there is no God; but that I *know not*;" and asks of the priest, "'Dost thou know, or dost thou guess?'" It is evident that Cooper was never an atheist; rather, like Huxley, he was an agnostic, although the scientist's coining of this term occurred some twenty years after this date. Woe has been the lot of man, the poet declares,

Since human worms crawled from their languageless  
Imperfect embryos, and by signs essayed  
To picture their first thoughts. 'Tis but excess  
Of folly to attempt the great charade  
To solve: and yet the irking wish must be obeyed.<sup>18</sup>

Night again returns, even as it closed long since upon the great mystery of

Two powers opposed  
Eternally \* \* \* Good with boundless wings  
Brooding o'er Universe, the egg whence springs  
Evil.<sup>19</sup>

The introduction to Book VII deals with Cooper's first brief London experience. He had been most impressed in

<sup>17</sup> This note first appears in the second edition of the poem. Cooper cites as his authorities Thomason's *Observations Introductory to a Work on English Etymology*, and Godfrey Higgins' *Analycyptis*.

<sup>18</sup> Book VI, st. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Book VI, st. 32.

that great city by its huge self-deluded crowds—even the beggars dreaming of riches and fame. The isolation of the individual amidst the city's teeming multitudes is noted in the lines:

Oh! if the heart doth crave for loneliness  
Deep in the crowded dessert it may find  
Its drear wish realized.<sup>20</sup>

Alluding to the curious crowds always eager to gaze at the city's showy spectacles of wealth and power, he wonders if a day will ever come when the toiler will refuse to be dazzled by such tinsel shows, but instead will be reminded by them of his wrongs and sufferings. Yet he prays that labor's starving millions may never in their wrath assail the palace of the young Queen. He had seen her upon her bridal day, and had been moved by sympathetic joy to breathe devotion to his sovereign, as had many another embittered heart. But now he must upbraid her for delaying to help the poor, and failing to carry out the promises of her time of happiness. She is admonished, when next passing through Whitehall, to remember the fate of a stubborn Stuart.

#### Hunger cries

Throughout thy realm—‘Queen from the fearful Past be wise.’<sup>21</sup> For his telling of plain truths he knows that he will be denounced by sycophants, but he can assure her that a thirst for violence does not yet possess the souls of labor's children; those who say the contrary wrong the poor. It is they rather than the haughty lords who truly care for her, in spite of their deep wrongs. They know that they suffer because of “the hordes of selfish men that hide the throne,” and believe that if she knew their woes they would not vainly cry for relief. He hopes she will seek to be “the heiress of love deserved;” although he almost despairs of Alfred's land being again ruled by

A monarch scorning blood-stained gauds and gold  
To build the throne in a blest People's love.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Book VII, st. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Book VII, st. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Book VII, st. 13.

For the Queen, too, is a prisoner, shut in by "deadly mind-blighting influences." Her turnkeys are "the herd of titled, starred, and sworded things" who surround her, and her bondage is for life. Queen and rebel Chartist are alike but creatures of circumstance. George III is called "a shame on royal birth," who with his elder son should be hung on an eternal gibbet where now his column stands. With savage irony the poet calls for the banishment from St. Paul's of monuments to churls like John Howard, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Dr. Johnson so that still more memorials may be erected there to "heroes of glory,"—

Glory—whose great brood  
Escape the gallows by a broidered coat  
And larger knife wherewith to shed the blood  
Of brothers.<sup>23</sup>

Yet not forever, he is confident, will the sun gild only murderer's monuments; a day is coming when the alliance of force and fraud will be overcome, for the land of Alfred and Shakespeare, where Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton sang, and Newton spanned the sky, must continue to be the nurse of freedom, or fade into fable, like older civilizations. This long introduction closes with the sad reflection that not until the coming of another spring will he receive his freedom.

The opening stanzas of Book VIII tell how the poet was moved to tears by the music of the newly installed prison chapel organ. Old Hundredth inspires an eulogy of Luther, its traditional author, who warred "for all men's right to think unawed by man," though he failed to carry out his own teaching. The bondage of Rome, Wickliffe and Luther and others, "Sires of our common Saxon fatherland, England and Germany," broke for all time. In the great age of light and love which draws on apace knowledge will sweep away all altars and thrones as things of lies and blood. In that glorious future day Paine will

<sup>23</sup> Book VII, st. 19. Similar objections to converting a Christian church into a temple of fame for military heroes have been raised by others (for example the 1898 edition of Baedeker's *London*). Cooper returned to this subject in *Cooper's Journal*, May 4, 1850.

be ranked with the martyrs for religion as a worker for Truth; Spinoza, Bayle, Rousseau, and Voltaire will be enshrined with Fenelon, Erasmus, and Pascal. But London then may be but a ruin; a new race from a distant land may see the lizard glide and the gray badger peep forth from weeds growing where once were populous squares. If she would avoid this evil destiny England must abolish the gaol and poor-house, war and the gallows; encourage Science to win from Nature the secrets of health and right living; and make books and education everywhere available. Then painting, music, and literature will be produced, not for the favored few, but

All for all; rank, class, distinction badge  
Forever gone.<sup>24</sup>

Book IX opens with a melodramatic scene of parting in the gaol between an exiled prisoner and his distracted wife. Her unhappy fate and that of their child are depicted in a series of stanzas whose essential theatricality is heightened by the strained and artificial diction in which they are set forth. A series of stanzas follow addressed to Woman, whose lot is one of sorrow. That "daemon legislation" the new Poor Law is explained by the fact that the upper classes put their children to suckle with a wet nurse, and send them away to school at a tender age, thus raising up a brood "alien of nature from the mother's womb." If such a man as Washington could be born in a convention-bound age, what may not the future produce, when woman is freed from the false homage of chivalry, and the tyrannical "eastern jealousy" which keeps her in ignorance. The mind, the poet asserts, is of no sex; once woman is granted her liberty feminine "thought-deeds" will equal those of man. The woman of the future, no longer a slave, a toy, a drudge, will nurture children capable of striking off the chains of error and of rising to new heights of achievement.

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<sup>24</sup> Book VIII, st. 20.

Book X opens with a fervent apostrophe to Liberty, whose shrine is the faithful patriot's breast. Liberty is "the great palladium of the moral man," lacking which he degenerates into a spiritless serf, but armed with which he may front kings. Raleigh, Ridley, and Sydney are named as English champions of liberty, which is implored to renew its quickening power upon the nation, for

We are become a servile, sordid crew  
The grandeur of our lineage is forgot<sup>25</sup>—

lines in which the echo of Wordsworth is unmistakable. Lord Brougham is assailed because of his part in securing the new Poor Law, legislation which is designed

Of Nature's rights the helpless wretch to spoil  
Who hath no bread because his lords refuse him toil.<sup>26</sup>

But no man any longer can halt the march of Liberty, for the "wand of Gutenberg" has burst the spell of wrinkled Ignorance,—she who betrayed the first-born children of Liberty. Today

the feudal serf, though still a clown,  
Doth read; and where his sires gave homage, pays—a frown!<sup>27</sup>

The sinewy artisan, the lean weaver, the shrunken stockinger, and the swart miner can at last read as well as think and feel. In their souls blythe Liberty is being born again, and it is they who will lay the true foundations for her reign. These humble toilers turn away from the monuments to Wellington and Nelson, doubting the worth of their wild record of blood.

Aye, they are thinking at the frame, and loom,  
At bench, and forge, and in the boweled mine,<sup>28</sup>

thinking how war has served their tyrants; pondering upon the problem of why "toil must pine, while Sloth doth revel;" resolving to band together to bring back primal brotherhood. Though impeded by false demagogues and

<sup>25</sup> Book X, st. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Book X, st. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Book X, st. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Book X, st. 18.

base hirelings this "new conspiracy" is sure to succeed.  
But it will no longer appeal to force;

The Past has warned the Million they must succeed  
By will—and not by war.<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult to endure contempt while starving, but the toiler must learn to control revenge, for "the pike, the brand, the blaze" would merely leave England where they have left France—"bondaged to sceptered cunning." Yet eventually Labor is certain to win; the prisoner prays that he may live to see its triumph. His fetters are less galling than the thought that the victims for whose cause he suffers are still unrelieved. While mistakes have marked his past course he has never "swerved to wilful wrong," and is resolved, "taught by the erring past" never again to leave the straight path to political justice. He dedicates himself anew to liberty, "undismayed, unswerving, and unsubdued," but resolved hereafter to be more wise. He prays for freedom from unworthy motives, from fear of death, and from calumny—a living death only too often "secure from Truth's Ithuriel spear." If he has kept his resolution to dedicate his life to liberty, he will be able to face death in peace. But the question of what lies beyond the grave still troubles him. Only death can subdue his inborn love of life.

Quotations from the *Purgatory of Suicides* in anthologies and elsewhere have usually been taken from these introductions to the ten cantos, for as one critic has stated:

The introductory stanzas to each of the ten books, except perhaps the first, are mostly beautiful. Where Mr. Cooper speaks himself, and keeps his suicidal spirits silent, he speaks well. We read him with pleasure, for we see into the kind poetic soul of the man; and we find him a genuine son of earth, with human feelings, human love, ay, and human hate, too, for a man should hate all that deserves hate. It is in these moods that Mr. Cooper's poetry comes out brightest.\*

\* Book X, st. 20.

\*\* Langford, John Alfred, *Prison Books and Their Authors*, London, 1861, p. 350.

b. *The Visions*

After the opening stanzas of personal reflection, each book of the *Purgatory of Suicides* goes on to describe the visions supposed to have visited the prisoner in his night-cell. After the first book, these visions consist less of description and more of the author's political, economic, and religious ideas, expressed in the form of long monologues, and sometimes dialogue, by the principal characters. These prolonged discussions upon such abstractions as justice, freedom, and human perfectibility are often dull and platitudinous, and frequently sound like Chartist speeches done into rhyme. The poem is marred also by too abundant personification, by forced and imperfect rhymes, and by those artificial terms and constructions usually pilloried under the epithet "poetic diction." On the other hand, passages and verses of genuine poetry occur intermittently in every part of this long composition.

The thread of continuity connecting the first and last of the dreams is but slight; in more than one instance the vision presented is merely an interpolated episode, with little to connect it with other parts of the poem save the fact that the protagonists are historical suicides. Cooper has introduced as many such characters as he could remember, without much attention to their logical connection with his theme. The suicides in most instances are mere "interlocutors on some high theme," so that their number might have been continued almost indefinitely. Cooper thought of his work not as a patterned jewel-piece, but rather as a necklace, to which a suitable gem might be added whenever and wherever discovered. He regretted, for instance, the omission of two such famous suicides as Lord Clive and Uriel Acosta. The history of the Portuguese Jew had especially impressed him,<sup>31</sup> but in prison he forgot his name, and was compelled to omit him.

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<sup>31</sup> *Vide Poetical Works of Thomas Cooper*, London, 1877, "Address to the Reader," p. x. Cooper at one time thought of writing a drama in which Acosta, whose story he first read in Leigh Hunt's *Liberal*, should play the principal part.

The opening stanzas of the first vision, while flawed, possess power.

Methought I voyaged in the bark of Death,—  
Himself the helmsman,—on a skyless sea  
Where none of all his passengers drew breath,  
Yet each, instinct with a strange vitality,  
Glared from his ghastly eye-balls upon me,  
And then upon that pilot, who upheld  
One chill and fleshless arm so witheringly  
That, while around his boat the hoarse waves swelled  
It seemed as if their rage that solemn signal quelled.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the labored movement of some of these lines, and the shock of the absurd adverb ending the seventh verse, this stanza does create a picture. The poet continues:

I know not how these mariners I saw:  
No light made visible the grisly crew:  
It seemed a vision of the soul, by law  
Of corp'ral sense unfettered.<sup>33</sup>

The

Myriad creatures [of] \* \* \* monstrous mould,  
Which thwart that dismal sea their hideous hugeness rolled.<sup>34</sup>  
are then described. Arrived at the shore, Death and his boat vanished, and his late passengers

Took, with an air of stern resolve, their way  
Into a gloomy land where startling visions lay.<sup>35</sup>

The desolate country through which they journeyed, their torturing thirst, their being suddenly plunged into poisonous swamps and then supernaturally restored to dry land, once more to continue their journey amidst hideous apparitions from the stagnant flood, are interestingly and on the whole successfully described. Eventually the spent travelers arrive at a great and gloomy cavern, within which for the time being they find repose. The author's spirit is exempt from the laws which coerce the vagrant movements of these spirits, and he is made mystically aware of

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<sup>32</sup> Book I, st. 17.  
<sup>33</sup> Book I, st. 18.  
<sup>34</sup> Book I, st. 18.  
<sup>35</sup> Book I, st. 21.

what he sees. Following certain of the ghostly wanderers through the immense aisles of the cavern, he finds himself in a high imperial hall, so vast that its roof is graced by rainbows. This heaven-sweeping roof is supported by columnar statues of all the mythical beings of the past—

## Ethiop

And headless, wearing mouth and eyes enshrined  
In their huge breasts,<sup>30</sup>

Egyptian gods, satyrs, and many other monstrosities, which stand in triple colonnade around the immense ellipsis of the hall, fearful of its fall. Thrones of strange and diverse design arise throughout the immense audience chamber, and by virtue of supernatural revelation the poet recognizes their occupants. These include Sardanapalus, "whose story," say the notes, "Lord Byron's splendid tragedy has rendered familiar to the most unclassical reader;" Cambes, "Lord of Lydia's pampered crew," whose grisly death a note describes; and Chousin, "the gray Cathaian autocrat with uneuphonious name" who ruled China in 1122 B. C. Figures from Greek legend next appear: Oedipus, Nauphus, and Aegeus; Ajax Telamon, Codrus (last king of Athens), the Spartan Lycurgus, and Charandas of ancient Sicily. The Old Testament suicides Saul and Zimri occupy adjoining thrones, as do the royal Roman criminals Nero, Appius Claudius, and Marc Antony. Present also are Otho, Maximian, and Bonosus, of the later Roman empire, and other "revelers in bloody mirth, Italian or Byzantine." The list of kings is completed by Mithridates, "whom Pontic Orient and the rich Levant owned lord," and "Juba of Mauretania, who slew himself rather than submit to Caesar; also

Nicocles, the Paphian, who alone  
Fled not dishonour when the conqu'ring sway  
Of Ptolomey fair Cypress owned.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Book I, st. 42. These are "those 'men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders,' 'to hear of whom [as Professor Lowes reminds us] Desdemona once did seriously incline.'"

<sup>31</sup> Book I, st. 59.

and who is accompanied by his wife and daughters, for  
the way

He took his bosom's queen and daughters fair  
Took also.<sup>38</sup>

Nor are these the only members of their sex. Cleopatra, of course, is present also, as well as Boadicea; Althea, to whom Shakespeare has a solitary reference, which is duly cited; Dido, who according to Cooper's note committed suicide to avert marriage with the king of Mauretania nearly three hundred years before the voyage of *Æneas* and Sisygambia, mother of Darius, who is said to have committed suicide because of Alexander's death. No less than seventeen notes are required to identify the various characters of this first book. Endowed with power to read the thought of the assembled spirits, "for no vocal resonance there was," the poet follows the vigorous mental debate which is just commencing. Some time earlier there had been uttered in Hades a prophecy that the spirits suffering there would ultimately, together with all the inhabitants of the earth, become free and equal. Lycurgus was the prophet. Sardanapalus taunts the sage with the non-fulfilment of his prediction, pointing out that although these kingly shades are condemned to periodical wanderings and the endurance of such tribulations as the dreamer had previously witnessed, yet once this purging penance had been performed they resumed their royal state. He, for one, believes,

'There must be conqu'ring lords, and slaves that yield;

There *hath* been, and there *will* be.<sup>39</sup>

The Chinese emperor follows in a similar strain, declaring that "novelties congrue but ill with social weal." Egypt, Chaldea, Hellas, all lit their lamps at the flame of Chinese culture.

The borrowed lights are quenched: the parent flame  
Glowes with undimmed and steady lustre still!<sup>40</sup>

The reason that China's pristine cities still remain unshaken is simply "obedience meek to the wearer of the diadem,"

<sup>38</sup> Book I, st. 59.

<sup>39</sup> Book I, st. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Book I, st. 86.

and the filial reverence of the young for the old. The sceptered spirits attest their approbation of these sentiments "by resplendent rays sent forth from their deep essence;" all save one, Marc Antony. He scorns "undisturbed regalities age-worn," and vaunts the superiority of the self-made dictator. He disputes, too, the truth of the Chinese emperor's description of his country. Only one other country can match the degradation of China—wretched Hibernia. He has no quarrel with regal power, but it should be grateful to such dictators as he. Stung by his scornful boasting, the kingly spirits overwhelm the audacious speaker by their frowns, and Nero arises to reply.

That thrones to thy stout valor owe huge debt!  
Is true as that thou wert an anchoret,  
Hero of the Actium! Vestal of the Nile!"

he cries to Antony; then turning to the later Roman emperors he upbraids them as weaklings who betrayed Rome's glory to the Goths. But fierce Maximian starts up to tell him,

of all who swayed  
Earth's sceptres, thou unworthiest shar'st this bliss,  
These shadowed thrones in spiritual necropolis"

As Rome's whole self-slain lineage seem about to fly at each other's throats, Mithridates, the Pontic king, arises, and the quarreling monarchs shrink "with fright to ignominious dumbness." Addressing Lycurgus, Mithridates says he does not blame him for allowing Rome's throned pygmies to speak unanswered, but he asks that the Spartan now declare the basis for his prophecy of royal dissolution, if he is not to expect the future contempt of the imperial shades. Lycurgus in reply admits the apparently impregnable power of the royal spirits, but he argues "from past change, more change our state admitting." It is possible, however, that he may be mistaken:

It may be the Few  
Shall still the Many trample and subdue:  
That Truth and Liberty shall bloom to die

<sup>a</sup> Book I, st. 102.

<sup>b</sup> Book I, st. 112.

Like glorious winged things, that swift pursue  
The sunbeam atoms for a day;<sup>43</sup>

it may be his faith that "fair equality shall one day hold sole sceptre on the earth" will prove but an empty dream. But now he feels, as do they, the penal throes returning, and he therefore summons them to renew this deep argument when their penance term is spent. He ceases, and as the spirits manifest their acquiescence to the plan, the vision fades, and the dreamer awakens.<sup>44</sup>

The second Book begins, as we have seen, with a long apostrophe to Milton, whose *Lycidas* evidently supplied the pattern for the following lines:

Lyre of my fatherland! anew to wake  
Thy solemn shell, I come, with trembling hand,  
Feeling my rudeness doth harsh discord make.<sup>45</sup>

It is the great Puritan himself who becomes the poet's guide in this second canto, although Cooper emphatically denied that in this he was, as one of the critics charged, following the precedent of Dante, for the sufficient reason that he had never read the Divine Comedy. He introduced Milton here because his mind was so filled with him that it seemed but natural to do so.

Milton conducts the dreaming prisoner to a high mountain up which thousands of unhappy spirits toil, seeking to escape the pangs of purgatory, and leaves him at a shaded grove after naming the two figures seated there. These two are Empedocles he "who to be deemed a god leapt fondly into Etna flames," and Cleombrotus, "who to enjoy Plato's elysium leapt into the sea."<sup>46</sup> Empedocles, who is discovered in the attitude of Jove burling thunderbolts, is upbraided by Cleombrotus for the folly of endeavoring to maintain any longer the pretense of his being a god. The sage in reply admits his folly, bewailing the fact that his character now is no different from what

<sup>43</sup> Book I, st. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Book I contains 146 stanzas.

<sup>45</sup> Book II st. 1.

<sup>46</sup> The adjective clauses following these names are quoted from *Paradise Lost*, Book III, lines 469-470 and 471-472.

it had been in life. He endeavors to justify his casting himself into Etna on the ground that unless his teaching, which was designed to lead men to higher things, possessed some shadow of awe to lend authority to his doctrine, men would not listen to it. Cleombrotus inquires why, if this is true, he has been condemned to Hades, and charges that instead the philosopher's heart, like every other human heart, had been moved by pride. When Empedocles suggests that they too scale the mountain, Cleombrotus is fired anew with his dream of attaining Elysium, and the two Greeks join the dense throng of upward-moving spirits, which is composed of the suicidal fanatics of all the religions of Europe and Asia. Different parts of the host fall to taunting one another, and then to blows—Crusader against Saracen, Turk against Jew, Catholic against Protestant. The two Greeks painfully escape this "mad dispute of million zealots," their late enthusiasm replaced by grief and despair. The younger man requests Empedocles to ease their sense of pain by beginning some intellectual discussion. Before the sage can comply they are joined by the Indian philosopher Calanus, whose self-immolation in the presence of Alexander is related by Plutarch, as a note informs the non-classical reader. Empedocles invites Calanus to discuss with them the riddle of human existence:

Whence Pain and Pleasure, Hope, Despair?  
Why Truth in endless metamorphosis  
Doth shroud itself. How Wisdom may declare  
Her precepts best; and how she best may snare  
The vulgar crowd her lessons to observe."

Calanus points out that this last state embodies the Greek's old error of supposing that truth can be served by fraud. Lies never nurture truth. The volcano did well to cast forth the philosopher's brazen sandals, thus preventing the success of his plan to convince the vulgar that he had been snatched away to heaven; and even had his deception been successful the enwoven fraud would have frustrated

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" Book II, st. 61.

his benign purpose. Calanus then describes that glorious future, already on the march, when the great emancipator, knowledge, will have abolished sin and misery, weakness and ignorance. The present lot of those now suffering in Hades is not to be their soul's eternal heritage. He has come to this mountain realm to summon its inhabitants to the high conclave requested by Lycurgus. But when importuned to supply reasons for his confident prophecy of a better age, he is not able to do so.

In Hades, as on earth, is mystery:  
Our being is a contest and a strife  
With its own essence: struggling to be free  
We add unto our fetters.<sup>48</sup>

The prophet himself falls into doubt when he seeks by reason to destroy doubt. Gradually the figure and the words of the speaker die away; the dreamer awakes; the vision is destroyed.<sup>49</sup>

The vision of Book III, which is one of the longest, is also unquestionably the weakest. It consists largely of bitter invective directed against Castlereagh in terms so fierce and bitter that the present-day reader experiences a revulsion in favor of the aspersed statesman, the author's purpose of exposing him to contempt and loathing defeating itself by its very vehemence. Modern historians are inclined to absolve Castlereagh of many of the charges brought against him by too intemperate radicals. His foreign policy of keeping England out of war was not understood, and Cooper is absurd in holding him personally responsible for the Peterloo massacre, the execution of Robert Emmett, and the blood traffic of the informers Edwards and Oliver. A man more bitterly hated than Castlereagh was hardly exists in English history. Even his death by his own hand was powerless to abate the feeling against "carotid-cutting Castlereagh." Cooper goes so far as to censure the Duke of Wellington for commanding the hissing crowd outside the funeral in Westminster Abbey

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<sup>48</sup> Book II, st. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Book II contains 90 stanzas.

to be silent. In this Book the author links Castlereagh with Judas Iscariot, and represents even that traitor as scorning him. Judas goes so far as to say:

"Twould purge  
Cain's sin and mine, with patriot brand to hew  
Into one heart like thine a festive avenue."<sup>50</sup>

A detailed synopsis of such an unfair, outgrown, and wearisome diatribe as forms the larger part of this Book would serve no good purpose. Suffice it to say that in this vision the dreamer finds himself on the shores of a bleak and storm-tossed lake, where presently the shade of Iscariot appears to lead him to the serpent-haunted cave in which the wretched Castlereagh is groveling. All of the insults and many of the torments that his most vindictive enemy could wish are heaped upon the head of one who is represented as the supreme liberticide and patricide of the ages. Although he admits the intermittent insanity of the Irish peer this he regards as no palliation for his crimes. Undoubtedly a channel through which the prisoner spent some of his own helpless rage against the injustice and oppression which he had witnessed so recently, this unhappy and unfortunate canto ends with Castlereagh's "shrieks of horrid madness," which awaken the dreamer in terror and dismay, to bless the morn which frees him from visions of such soul-quelling dread.<sup>51</sup>

The fourth book is exactly half as long as the third. The vision begins with a description of the land of poesy which lies beyond the caverns and vaulted dome of the first canto. Though still within the demesne of Hades it is a pleasant land of unremitting bird-song, carpeted with innumerable wild-flowers. Here the dreamer listens enraptured to the harping of an unseen bard who sings the high deeds of chivalry. As the "stately burthen couched in antique tongue" abruptly ceases, there passes swiftly by the shade of fated Chatterton, "sad, mournful, slow, with eyes downcast." The beautiful Sappho next appears, posed at the

<sup>50</sup> Book III, st. 82.

<sup>51</sup> Book III contains 125 Spenserian stanzas.

end of an aisle of funereal evergreens. In stanzas notably silted and frigid <sup>52</sup> she bewails the coldness of Phaon. Her lamentations are interrupted by the stately Lucretius, who chides the poetess for allowing passion to usurp the inheritance of reason, and tells her that

Proof hath Nature spread  
That strong Necessity rules the wide expanse  
of Universe.<sup>53</sup>

The Lesbian disputes this doctrine.

Fate, or Necessity: Bard, what is this  
But Ign'rance veiled in simulance of words?<sup>54</sup>

Since the soul loathes pain, deformity, and decay she believes that these things shall not always be. But Lucretius answers that while there is a native yearning of the mind to unbind the chains of discord, all things are governed by the immutable laws of nature. Their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of Lucan, who comes to bid the poet people of this country to the debate upon the coming of democracy. The vision closes with the whole poetical company chanting, "We come, we come to join the jubilee of thought." While more pleasing than the last this book <sup>55</sup> suffers from the entire lack of action. Other weaknesses are conventional and uninspired characterization and the inclusion of so much abstract discussion which is essentially unpoetic. Archaic terms, obsolete forms, neologisms, and grammatical barbarisms which are present throughout the poem, but especially in this book, result in an artificial diction which is labored and unnatural, and sometimes downright ugly and repulsive.

Book V, which is also comparatively short, introduces several figures of the French Revolution; all save two, Girondists. The vision opens upon a bleak and barren plain strewn with the broken monuments of those who

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<sup>52</sup> Book IV, st. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Book IV, st. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Book IV contains 62 Spenserian stanzas.

like Ozymandias vainly sought their own glory. Passing this dreary waste the dreamer gains a vacant mound which is marked like Stonehenge by "a mystic cirque of giant stones." Here the company of Gallic shades has assembled. Communication between these spirits, as in the first vision, is voiceless—"mind to mind." The discussion turns once more upon the impossibility of reconciling a merciful and just Omnipotence with the existence of eternal punishment. Buzot (who, like his fellow Girondins had committed suicide to escape the proscription of Robespierre's party) opens the exchange of opinion by bewailing the relapse of France into the grip of clergy and royalty. He asks Condorcet whether they were right in believing that church and thrones would be swept away. To Condorcet the question admits of only one answer: "the spirit of Prometheus doth but sleep in man's heart." He concludes his speech with defiance of a deity capable of punishing a moment's doubt, a foolish error, with fire eternal. Roland next takes up the theme. He believes that the universe proclaims an All-wise Architect, and counsels submission to the divine will, which earthly reason is too feeble to comprehend. Condorcet replies that such reasoning has throughout the ages been the master trick of the priests, who continually cry:

"View thy finiteness with shame  
And bow before the Infinite!"<sup>55</sup>

What seems to man in finite time detestable, these tricksters says, may appear right and consistent by the measurement of eternity. If so, and God may thus juggle with human ideals of justice, why may He not deny bliss finally even to those who have endeavored to obey his laws? Petion (Girondist mayor of Paris) protests against continuing a discussion of the senile fables of an old superstition. Valaze bitterly attacks Roland for his opinions, and is in turn attacked by the Jacobin La Bas. The former strife between Girondist and those of the Mountain is on the

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<sup>55</sup> Book V, st. 47.

point of breaking out again when the majestic wrathful shade of blind old Samson appears. He rebukes them as a "dark atheist brood" whose just punishment it is that they here continue the unholy passions with which they were consumed on earth. Jehovah would scorn to justify himself to such proud and foolish men. Condorcet hurls back words of contempt for Samson's God of blood, and to Samson himself he boldly cries:

Phantom avaunt! No real shape thou art,  
But gendered of our insane rage and broils.<sup>57</sup>

The ancient hero sternly tells them that they who affrighted the earth with their bloody excesses are fit to address only some murder deity. As for himself, he slew his foes in self-defence, and to save his country from slavery; they in the name of freedom slaughtered their own countrymen. Having thus overwhelmed and silenced them, Samson declares his errand—announcement of the forthcoming conclave to debate equality—and vanishes. Baboeuf [one of the last to struggle for ultra-democracy after Robespierre's death] now pleads for brotherly concord, and cessation of their earthly strife and rivalry, but Condorcet protests against any feelings which fail to expel errors of the mind:

Man's noblest part is still to battle Fate \* \* \*  
Joy, as grief, to moderate  
By Reason's rule—not monkish rigour strict.<sup>58</sup>

He suggests that they renew the debate at the gathering to which they have been bidden—and the sleeper awakes.<sup>59</sup>

In Book VI the scene of the vision is again the rainbow-roofed audience hall of Book I. Seventeen stanzas are employed to identify and describe the most illustrious of the assembled shades, whose seats, which are mingled among the thrones, indicate the pride, revenge, courage, wisdom, patriotism, or eloquence which have distinguished their famed occupants. Among these the dreamer identi-

<sup>57</sup> Book V, st. 69.

<sup>58</sup> Book V, st. 82.

<sup>59</sup> Book V contains 88 Spenserian stanzas.

fies Demosthenes, Themistocles and Zeno; also the Romans Cato, Brutus, Cassius, Curtius (he who leaped into the gulf) Caius Gracchus, and the orator Carbo, who, according to Cicero killed himself because he could not endure the enormity of his countrymen's vices, "a kind of suicide," Cooper remarks, "long out of fashion in the world."<sup>60</sup> Achitophel, the Macabees Eleazer and Razis, Arbogast the Frank, and many of the characters mentioned earlier in the poem are also present. Mithridates opens the proceedings by reminding them of Lycurgus' prophecy. Cleanthes, Zeno's noble disciple, speaks first. He seeks not to offend the monarchs:

But that changes o'er ye lour  
I also prophecy! Man will ascend  
To Truth, and soon unto false glory cease to bend.<sup>61</sup>

Appius, "Rome's old lecher vile," rises up to jeer, but is so overwhelmed by popular disapproval that he flees the scene. A filthy and obscene baboon thereupon briefly occupies his throne, and as it vanishes

In the rainbowed sky a giant hand  
Appeared, and pointed to the throneless void.<sup>62</sup>

Hannibal prophesies from this the destruction of "thrones of bloated vice," but does not believe that good and evil rulers will both be punished alike. The thrones of Nero and Bonosus are next seen to be occupied by a tiger and a hog, and again the pointing hand appears. Gracchus now arises. He appeals to the nobler feelings of the assembled kings, urging them to put aside their special privileges, to acknowledge the brotherhood of man, and to join in united effort to banish want and sorrow. Demosthenes eloquently seconds the plea; and Themistocles also urges the monarchs to be truly noble and aid in the emancipation of earth and Hades. Saul, the Hebrew king, who speaks next, declares his willingness to renounce his royal prerogatives if that will benefit mankind, but he is doubt-

<sup>60</sup> Book VI, Note 14.

<sup>61</sup> Book VI, St. 56.

<sup>62</sup> Book VI, st. 80.

ful whether such an action will be approved by the Most High, who seems to manifest little

zeal to emancipate  
Tophet and earth from penal torment's cry  
And suffering's groan.<sup>63</sup>

Achitophel points out that their thrones still stand fast, and challenges the Spartan to prove his prophecy true. But Eleazer the Macabee announces that kings will not receive counsel from one who in life was the tool of treachery. Eleazer advises the monarchs not to reject Lycurgus' words. It has been prophesied of old on Judah's mountains that

Earth, one day, should be born anew,  
And smile with brotherhood of all—Gentile and Jew.<sup>64</sup>

Nicocles, the Paphian king, utters like counsel; and Otho, too, pleads for the preferment of the general good. When Achitophel rises to reply to them he is transformed into a hideous monster, which vanishes from their sight. The faces of the assembled kings—quite naturally—begin to grow apprehensive. But Mithridates declares they have incurred no guilt by retaining in Hades the royal station to which they were appointed on earth; or if they have, he is ready to accept his fate. Deep silence reigns until Lycurgus arises to utter the confident prophecy:

Kings hold their last divan:  
When next beneath this arch cerulean  
We meet, all will be equal!<sup>65</sup>

He goes on to show that thrones are rooted in human ignorance. Kings, once leaders by virtue of courage and ability, have degenerated into fools and cowards. Religion, too, is founded on fraud. Between king and priest there was at first contest, but ultimately they joined forces to exploit the people. Right has now obtained the help of knowledge, and in every land knowledge and freedom are supplanting craft and power. On earth and in Hades like judgments are unfolding. He exhorts the kings to

<sup>63</sup> Book VI, st. 87.

<sup>64</sup> Book VI, st. 97.

<sup>65</sup> Book VI, st. 115.

cast down their diadems and sceptres, resolved to aid "the great emprise of glorious goodness." At the climax of his appeal he stretches forth his hand towards the multitude, and thousands of his hearers each raise a hand aloft,

And light empyreal from each Essence blazed  
Until I woke,—with the bright vision soul-bedazed.<sup>66</sup>

The similarity between this climax and that of some great evangelical meeting with its call upon sinners at the end of the exhorter's appeal is but one more indication of the irrepressible preacher beneath the apparent sceptic. Yet it is surprising how completely modern history has fulfilled this enthusiastic prophecy of the end of absolute power in church and throne.<sup>67</sup>

In the vision portion of Book VII the shades of three Romans [Apicius the glutton, and Nero's courtiers Sophronous and Petronious Arbiter], of two Frenchmen [Vatel and Villeneuve], and of two Englishmen [Mordaunt and Lumley] are the interlocutors. This group of sensualists and fribbles, with others of their kind, pass through a land littered with the marred and broken images of the gaudy toys in which they had once delighted, arriving finally at a sluggish lake which surrounds the Castle of Sloth. The characters named, too spiritless to wade the shallow stream and climb the castle walls, lie down on the beach, where they recline too listless even to talk. After they have rested Mordaunt calls upon Petronious for some tale of that arch incendiary his master. The Arbiter resents the imputation, and declares that Nero burned Rome to cleanse it from its foul tenements, which were spreading disease and death.<sup>68</sup> Villeneuve delivers a panegyric upon war, which he says offer a healthful blood-letting for the nation. Apicius and Sophronous declare that nought on earth is worth a sigh except the senses and their gratification. Lumley, however, feels that total annihilation is the

<sup>66</sup> Book VI, st. 130.

<sup>67</sup> There are 130 Svenserian stanzas in Book VI.

<sup>68</sup> The notes state that this defense of Nero is based on one of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*.

only boon worthy of gratitude, for pain is the inheritance of all things:

Pleasure doth but serve to pall:

'Tis but a sweet to render bitterer Life's gall.<sup>69</sup>

Vatel rejects such monstrous doctrine; he believes that even here they are not wholly lost. The legendary Robert le Diable now appears, to announce a second message from the sages and princely spirits whose former invitation they had slighted. He tells them

It is no dream: Hades and earth are waking  
To consciousness of Mind's omnipotence.<sup>70</sup>

He calls upon the spirits before him to join in the universal triumph, and is "with meet attention heard" by all save Apicius—who bids him begone and cease to disturb his slumbers—and Sophronous—who merely sinks in deeper doze. As the Norman exclaims that such brutish essences must doubtless lie prostrate forever, the imprisoned dreamer awakens.<sup>71</sup>

Book VIII is weak and formless. The visionary, after first being stricken with physical blindness, is endowed with spiritual sight. He sees first of all twelve tableaux of woe, most of them classical commonplaces, such as Orpheus and Eurydice, Hero and Leander, and the death of Socrates. These are followed by strains of anguished music as the Cimbri, the Jews of York, and other persecuted peoples, who to escape capture and ignominy committed national suicide, pass wailing by. Only after this long and disjointed preamble are the interlocutors introduced. After the philosopher Menedemus has rebuked Pomponius Atticus for his assertion that no human estate is exempt from sorrow, there follows the inevitable "descant" upon the glories of the future when universal brotherhood will prevail. Vibius Varius asks how this reign of mercy is to begin while kings continue their calamitous feuds, and is told that a new divan of the spirits has been summoned,

<sup>69</sup> Book VII, st. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Book VII, st. 70.

<sup>71</sup> Book VII contains 77 Spenserian stanzas.

and monarchs now display zeal for equality and brotherhood. As the hope-inspired choral song "We come" swells forth the dreamer again awakens.<sup>72</sup>

Only feminine characters appear in Book IX, the shortest of the cantos. Across a vast, unbounded plain whose living green is spangled with thousands of lovely, though scentless, flowers, feminine forms smiling pass and repass. These are the chaste maids and heroic, faithful wives who preferred suicide to dishonor, or who

nobly shed their blood  
In patriotic struggle, when the swords  
Of tyrants slew their sons and sires.<sup>73</sup>

From out the Roman group two matrons draw apart, "Porcia", wife of Brutus and daughter of Cato, and Arria  
who to assuage

Fear in her husband—by the tyrant's rage  
Death-doomed—plunged to her heart the steel, and cried  
"It is not painful!"<sup>74</sup>

Like the others they enjoy here a state of felicity, though still remembering with tenderness their earthly friends, and "the hours of youthful love." The wife of the Carthaginian Hasdrubal joins them, and is cordially welcomed, as human hatreds have no place here. To man's fierce maxim "Revenge is sweet," these gentle souls reply, "Forgiveness is sweeter." Sophronia, the Christian maid who stabbed herself to escape the violence of Maxentius, and Baruna, the learned Jewess, also meet here on terms of affection. After recalling to their minds the fearful persecutions of the Jews by so-called Christians, Baruna hails the more blessed future, when—

the slaver  
Shall with his victims join—to slay no more!  
The lion with the lamb shall make his lair.<sup>75</sup>

As all the happy sister-spirits join hands to speed their flower-spangled way, distant thousands take up the triumphant choral chant:

<sup>72</sup> Book VIII contains 71 Spenserian stanzas.

<sup>73</sup> Book IX, st. 24.

<sup>74</sup> Book IX, st. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Book IX, st. 47.

Farewell forever to the reign of gloom,  
 Of human suffering, and grief, and wrong!  
 Welcome, for Earth, her new and happy doom!  
 Welcome, for franchised spirits, Hades' blissful home! <sup>77</sup>

The prison bell shatters the beatific vision, and recalls the sleeper to the painful circumstances of his real life.<sup>78</sup>

The Tenth Book is "a gladsome dream" of  
 A festival of Brotherhood and Mind  
 By suicidal spirits held, from thrall  
 Of Evil freed; and mystically designed  
 To adumbrate future bliss for Earth and humankind.<sup>79</sup>

Under the great dome all the famous figures previously mentioned, and such additional ones as Washington, Alfred, Homer, Whitbread, Columbus, and Montezuma are ranged, a "spiritual pantheon" of the truly great. Montezuma—a strange figure in this gallery—cannot forget his love "for dear Mexico and my crushed race." But the spirit of the Irish patriot Wolfe Tone maintains that his country has known a harder fate, compelled to faint,

And pine, and howl, and curse their tyrant lords  
 For ages, and still feel a strange constraint  
 To live and multiply mean, selfish hordes.<sup>80</sup>

An Athenian reminds them that "the mother-land of Freedom wore the gyves of slavery for ages." Yet he feels that  
 not sadness

Should rise while back upon the Past we look:  
 But grateful joy that Man's career of madness  
 Hath wise fruition—age-long woe doth end in gladness.<sup>80</sup>

To the strains of thrilling music the figures of the great then mingle with the throngs who now enter the great hall under the wondrous rainbow. The monarchical thrones have disappeared, as have also the monsters who formerly supported the heavenly roof, which is now self-suspended. The kings of the former visions, uncrowned and unsceptered, mingle on equal terms with the poets,

<sup>77</sup> Book IX, st. 49.

<sup>78</sup> Book IX contains 51 Spenserian stanzas.

<sup>79</sup> Book X, st. 31.

<sup>80</sup> Book X, st. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Book X, st. 62.

sages, and patriots. The different characters of the previous books—even Judas and some of the ghosts from the land of desolation and sloth—are present; only the spirit of Castlereagh is noticeably absent, an ill omen for the likelihood of the early realization of human brotherhood. The inevitable orations follow next, the spirits now having power to utter human speech. Lycurgus is the first to address the great assembly, and Mithridates, Cato, Zeno, Cleanthes, Lucretius, Gracchus, Demosthenes, Condorcet, and Rémilly follow; the speech of the first three and of Gracchus being the only ones reported at full length. The book ends with a choral chant by the whole assembly, which, the poet says in the concluding lines of his long work,

o'erwrought me to a throe  
Of bliss; and I awoke to find my home  
A dungeon,—thence, to ponder when would come  
The day that Goodness shall the earth renew,  
And Truth's young Light disperse old Error's gloom,—  
When Love shall Hate, and Meekness Pride subdue,—  
And when the Many cease their slavery to the Few! <sup>51</sup>

Immediately following its publication at the end of August the *Purgatory of Suicides* was reviewed in the *Britannia* by David Trevena Coulton, the editor of that newspaper. This first notice was so wholly laudatory, and so indiscriminatingly enthusiastic, that even the author felt its commendation to be greater than his work deserved. Coulton's assertion that Cooper was "one of those great poets stamped by Nature's own hand, not fashioned by schools," may be accepted with some abatement for exaggeration, but his further pronouncement that the poem has no feeble passages, no weak rhymes, no compromise of strength to rhyme"

and that it is

grander and more nervous than *Childe Harold*, which in its reflective passages it somewhat resembles \* \* \*. Such a strain has not been sung in England for two hundred years.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Book X, stanza 126.

<sup>52</sup> *Britannia*, August 30, 1845.

must be dismissed as completely irresponsible, and an indication that newspaper reviewing in 1845 was no more judicious than it is, as a rule, today.

This first review was followed by a similarly favorable, but somewhat more discriminating notice in the *Eclectic Review*, from the pen of William Howitt, who said in part:

We have here a genuine poem, springing out of the spirit of the times, and indeed out of the heart and experience of one who has wrestled with and suffered for it \* \* \* one of the same class as Burns, Ebenezer Elliott, Fox the Norwich weaver-boy \* \* \* all rising out of the labour class into the class of the thinkers and builders-up of English greatness. \* \* \* [The] subject is rather curious than poetical; and although [the author] has contrived to invest it with features and circumstances of grandeur, yet \* \* \* it is not the legitimate matter of the subject, but the introductions to each book which are the truly poetical portions of the volume. \* \* \* Greatly as we estimate the power of the author, we must at the same time state that [his] work \* \* \* is by no means devoid of faults; on the contrary, it is crowded with them, and some of them of a very serious nature. There is a great obscurity frequently in working out the story and the dialogue; an odd jumble of ancient and modern personages together. The versification is often rude and prosaic in the extreme, betraying great haste, and culpable neglect of retouching and polishing.<sup>83</sup>

"Of far greater moment" than these artistic defects, however, was

the tendency of certain theological opinions, which, as the volume is likely to fall into the hands of the working and little-educated classes, we cannot too severely denounce.<sup>84</sup>

Notices of the new work appeared promptly also in the *Athenaeum*,<sup>85</sup> *Sentinel*,<sup>86</sup> and *Illuminated Magazine*,<sup>87</sup> and *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* reviewed the volume at the beginning of the following year. This last periodical described Cooper as a man of many talents, great enthusiasm, remarkable facility of expression, and fervid eloquence, but condemned his poem as lacking in original ideas, noble expression, and true harmony of numbers. Cooper's perpetual display of learning, and continual al-

<sup>83</sup> *Eclectic Review* (London) vol. lxxxii (n. s. xviii) pp. 671 f.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

lusion to characters and events familiar only to persons more than commonly well read must, it was pointed out, render his work unacceptable to most readers, particularly to those belonging to his own order. His descriptive passages were said to resemble Dante's in their power of conveying a sense of the gloomy and vast, but not in firm directness. Milton was recognized as the principal influence upon the writing; the new epic had the same remoteness of allusion and gorgeousness of imagery as the old, but the images of the *Purgatory* frequently verged upon the vague and turgid, physical vastness being substituted for genuine power of thought and simple sublimity. The critique concluded by stating that despite its faults the work contained many stanzas of noble verse, and the reviewer recommended its perusal, both for its own sake, and as an example of the talent to be found among the people.

None of the great quarterlies or more famous monthlies noticed the existence of the work, but Kingsley in an article contributed to the *North British Review* in 1852, entitled "Burns and His School," said of the *Purgatory of Suicides* that it belonged to the school of Ebenezer Elliott rather than that of Burns, "though never degrading itself by Elliott's ferocity." Kingsley expressed a hope for better work from the new author, whose verses, he said, exhibited not only a want of softness and sweetness similar to that of Elliott's but also a lack

of clearness, of logical connection of thought, in which Elliott seldom fails except when cursing. The imagination is hardly as vivid as Elliott's, though fancy and invention, the polish, the style, and the indication of profound thought on all subjects within the poet's reach are superior in every way to those of the Corn Law Rhymer; and when we consider that the man who wrote it had to gather his large store of classic learning and historic anecdote while earning his living first as a shoemaker, and then as a Wesleyan country

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<sup>22</sup> *Athenaeum*, September 6, 1845.

<sup>23</sup> *Sentinel*, October 12, 1845.

<sup>24</sup> *Illuminated Magazine*, October, 1845.

preacher, we can only praise and excuse, and hope that the day may come when talents of so high an order will find some healthier channel for their energies than that in which they are now flowing.<sup>88</sup>

The third edition of the *Purgatory of Suicides* [1853] was reviewed in the weekly *Bizarre* of Philadelphia, in an article which extended through five numbers. This reviewer compared Cooper's work with that of Shelley in point of heterodoxy, and pronounced Shelley to have been the more atheistical in *Queen Mab*, observing:

Cooper's atheism—we should not go quite so far, and yet we do not know what else to call it; to say it is infidelic is but vague \* \* \* so that if we call it atheism we may be the nearest, though it must be understood not to be Shelley's atheism—is something indefinite. \* \* \* It is not at all improbable that his ideas may change for the better.<sup>89</sup>

Referring to the opening stanzas which present a poetical version of Cooper's speech at Hanley, the reviewer stated: "We have had the pleasure of hearing Cooper speak, and we have heard few that could equal him, either in thought or in soul-stirring eloquence." After considering the poem book by book, and quoting from it extensively, these articles concluded:

It has not been our desire to find out faults—though we confess there are many; we have rather labored to point out the beauty, power, and originality which [this work] claims over any poem that has been produced for many years [though] the author [for telling] too many plain truths \* \* \* has sacrificed that popularity which has fallen to such wishy-washy, namby-pamby poets as Alexander Smith and Gerald Massey.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *North British Review*, No. xxi. The article is included in the Works of Charles Kingsley, London, 1888, vol. xx, *Literary and General Lectures and Essays*, p. 156.

<sup>89</sup> The *Bizarre*, an original literary gazette, Philadelphia, Pa., V, No. 26, VI, Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4, [October 1854]. It is possible that the visions of the *Purgatory of Suicides* owe something to the greater visions of Shelley. Cooper was a great admirer of this poet, and early familiar with his work. The *Purgatory* resembles *Queen Mab* in being a vision, in its denunciation of priesthood, and in its prophecy of a future age of brotherhood.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

As Cooper's verse is no longer read there are few contemporary judgments upon it. It is the opinion of Professor Hugh Walker that

The *Purgatory of Suicides* has many faults. The Miltonic inversions and complexity of sentence, imitated by an ill-educated man, produce a deplorable effect. The style, in short, is inartistic and bad, and the tone generally too shrill to be dignified.<sup>91</sup>

Four editions of the work were brought out, each one by a different publisher. The first edition was issued in 1845 under the imprint of Jeremiah How.<sup>92</sup> The second, or People's Edition, was published in November 1847 by James Watson, who also issued the work during this same year in eighteen numbers costing 2d. each,<sup>93</sup> and in six monthly parts costing 6d. each. To this second edition Cooper added further explanatory and historical notes and revised the original notes slightly. The punctuation and misprints of the first edition were also corrected. In 1853 Chapman and Hall issued a third edition, for which Cooper "corrected sundry inartistic rhymes as well as misprints which were found in the first and second edition." He distinctly declared, however, that he had not altered, and could not alter the treatment of some subjects on which, within these seven years, his thinkings have undergone considerable modification, without changing altogether the character of his "Prison-Rhyme."<sup>94</sup> The *Collected Poetical Works of Thomas Cooper*, published in 1877 by Hodder and Stoughton contained a reprint of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, and in this fourth edition there was, for the first time, a softening down of half a dozen passages dealing with religious and political matters, as follows:

In the first three editions Book I, st. 7, reads—

The cellar of a Christian priest they found,  
And with its poison fired their misery

<sup>91</sup> Walker, H., *Literature of the Victorian Era*, p. 350.

<sup>92</sup> The New York Public Library and the London Reform Club Library possess first editions of the *Purgatory of Suicides*.

<sup>93</sup> The poem was published in numbers so as to make it available to the working class. The Columbia University Library has in this form part of Book VIII and Books IX and X complete.

<sup>94</sup> Preface to 3rd edition of *Purgatory of Suicides* [1853].

To mad revenge,—swift hurling to the ground  
And flames—bed, cassock, wine-cups of the tippler gowned.

In the *Poetical Works* this stanza reads—

A sore of maddening alcohol they found,  
And with its poison fired their misery  
To fierce revenge, swift hurling to the ground  
And flames—dwellings, and lifeless things that stood around.

Three stanzas [46, 49 and 50] of Book II—which describe the religious fanatics and warring Christian schismatics whom Empedocles sees whirled up the mountain steep—are omitted in the *Poetical Works*; also nine stanzas of Book III [117-125], the revised edition ending with stanza 116 slightly revised. In this last case the deleted stanzas merely repeat vilification of Castlereagh already expressed at wearisome length in the earlier stanzas, and their omission is clear artistic gain. A brief note on Robert Emmet [who was mentioned in Stanza 118] was also necessarily omitted. In the Notes to Book V the references to Frost and Snell [which in the third edition carried the bracketed comment previously noted] are in the final edition omitted entirely, as is also reference to Ellis, which would have been pointless in 1877 as by that date the exile was either dead, or returned to England, his sentence having expired in 1864.

While there are hundreds of slight changes in diction and pointing between the first and last editions of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, the changes and omissions here noted are the only ones of any importance which a line by line comparison of the two editions has revealed. Certainly they do not justify George Jacob Holyoake's charge that "Cooper changed the tenor of his poem, put in his creed, and destroyed its life." <sup>95</sup>

\* Holyoake's opinion may have been the result of Cooper's statement in the Preface to the *Collected Works*—"Without hesitation I have expunged lines and stanzas which I found contained mis-statements of fact, or which I thought violated right feeling." But as Cooper remarks further in the same place, and as shown above, the poem is given in its final form "with little alteration"—certainly not enough to justify Holyoake's stricture.

When greatly in need of money, Cooper sold the copyright of this work to Watson for fifty pounds. A young admirer of the poet, Mr. Thomas Chambers, of H. M. Customs, bought it back from Watson in 1860 and presented it to the author,<sup>96</sup> who retained the copyright henceforth. The original manuscript of the *Purgatory of Suicides* was owned by Mr. Chambers in 1872; today it is in the possession of Sir Richard Winfrey, of Castor House, Peterborough, England.

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<sup>96</sup> Life, p 303.

## CHAPTER XIX

### FINDING A PUBLISHER

Full details of the various checks, disappointments, and final triumph attending the publication of Cooper's first book [for the earlier *Wesleyan Chiefs* was a mere booklet, with no circulation beyond its meagre subscription list] were published first in the columns of the *Northern Star*, and afterwards in the autobiography.<sup>1</sup>

After recovering from the temporarily prostrating effect of his unaccustomed freedom, Cooper called on Thomas Slingsby Duncombe at his rooms in the Albany, Picadilly, a not unsuitable address, as the Finsbury member was a noted sportsman and dandy, whose attendance at the fashionable gambling clubs was even more frequent than his appearances at Chartist meetings. Duncombe received Cooper kindly enough—it was a Sunday morning—but declared he knew nothing of publishers. Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and asking the anxious author to wait a few minutes, he disappeared, to return shortly with a note addressed to Disraeli, at that time still untitled. This he handed to his visitor, who read with astonishment:

My dear Mr. Disraeli,—

I send you Mr. Cooper, a Chartist, red-hot from Stafford Gaol. But don't be frightened. He won't bite you. He has written a poem and a romance; and he thinks he can cut out "Coningsby" and "Sybil!" Help him if you can, and oblige,

Yours,

T. S. Duncombe<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Some will think, perhaps, that I have been too minute in narrating the sinuosities of my experience in attempting to get my book before the reading public. Yet I humbly judge that I am simply making a legitimate contribution to literary history, by giving the details of my experience. *Life*, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 263. Duncombe's son does not include this incident in his two volume memoir of his mercurial parent.

Cooper made some feeble remonstrance at delivering such a letter, but the jovial Duncombe told him to be off, and that he would find Disraeli's house at Grosvenor Gate, close to the Park. Thither Cooper repaired. He was confronted at the door by a tall Hebrew in livery, who informed him that Mr. Disraeli was not at home. Upon being advised that Cooper was the bearer of a note from Mr. Duncombe, the servant admitted that his master was in, took the letter above stairs, and then showed him into Disraeli's study, a small room at the top of the house. Of the jaded and expressionless mask which later characterized the Conservative leader's face, Cooper saw nothing in 1845. He thought the countenance "one of great intellectual beauty; the eyes seemed living lights."<sup>3</sup>

After some questioning regarding Cooper's treatment in prison Disraeli remarked, "I wish I had seen you before I finished my last novel; my heroine, Sybil, is a Chartist."<sup>4</sup>

Upon Cooper's requesting him to write a line of introduction to Moxon, if he felt after reading the first books of the poem that the work was worthy of publication, Disraeli humorously objected, "But Mr. Moxon is not my publisher; and when I offered him a poem of my own some years ago he declined to take it."<sup>5</sup>

Then he inquired, "Why do you wish me to write Mr. Moxon so particularly?" "Because," was the reply, "he publishes poetry, and as he has published poetry of his own—" "Ah," broke in Disraeli, "poet-like, you think he must sympathize with you because he is a poet. You forget that he is a tradesman too, and that poetry does not sell nowadays."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> "He [Disraeli] dreamt of an epic poem, and his early ambition urged him a step or two in that direction, but his critical faculty, wh'ch, despite all his monstrosities of taste, was vital, restrained him from making a fool of himself, and he foreswore the muse." *Collected Essays .. of .. Augustine Birrell*, N. Y., 1923, vol. 1, p. 384. *Life*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

But a few days later he sent Cooper the desired note. When the latter presented it to the person to whom it was addressed, Moxon smiled, and said, "Mr. Disraeli knows that poetry is a drug in the market. He does not offer me one of his own novels." Politely but firmly the famous publisher declined to consider the work of a new and unknown author. He was most courteous; discoursed on Lamb; mentioned that Wordsworth and Tennyson had lately spent an hour in that very room; and at parting declared, "I certainly would publish your poem, Mr. Cooper, if I saw anything like a chance of selling it; but I repeat to you that all poetry is a perfect drug in the market, at present; and I have made up my mind to publish no more poetry whatever."<sup>7</sup>

When apprised of the failure of this application, Disraeli promptly sent Cooper a second note of introduction, this time to his own publisher, Colburn.<sup>8</sup> Disraeli's letter was, of course, an open sesame to this firm's office, where he met not only "the little shrewd-looking publisher himself" but also "his trusty adviser Mr. Schoeberl." The latter repeated Moxon's declaration that poetry was unsalable, but professed interest in the romance [later published as *Captain Cobler*] which Disraeli had also mentioned in his letter. The manuscript of this work was accordingly submitted, but after a few days it was sent back with a very polite refusal to publish it.<sup>9</sup>

Cooper's second application to Disraeli had been by letter; he now ventured to call upon him again. The kindly statesman expressed concern at the ill-success of Cooper's efforts to find a publisher, and when Cooper asked for

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>8</sup> Colburn, who also published Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, is described by Augustine Birrell as "a pushing advertising publisher, alleged to have royal blood in his veins." Hazlitt [E.M.L.] p. 154. In his essay *Walter Scott* [1838] Carlyle refers to "the hundred Incoherencies, cobbled hastily together by order of Colburn and Company." Dickens had a furious quarrel with Colburn over the editing of *Pic-Nic Papers*—Straus, *R. Charles Dickens*, N. Y., 1928, pp. 168-165.

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, p. 267.

still a third note, this time to Chapman and Hall, declared that although he did not care to write to them, as he did not know the members of the firm personally, he was quite willing to write to Harrison Ainsworth and request him to furnish the desired introduction, and this was accordingly done.<sup>10</sup>

Upon Cooper's first visit to Ainsworth's house at Kensal Green the novelist was absent, but his daughter received the manuscript and Disraeli's note, and promised to give them to her father. Two days later when Cooper called again, Ainsworth, "a handsome, fresh-looking Englishman \* \* \* [with] a very pearly set of teeth,"<sup>11</sup> received him cordially. Like Disraeli he was interested in the poet's imprisonment, and like Moxon he was sure that all poetry sold badly now. He considered Cooper's poem excellent, but was afraid Chapman and Hall might not be inclined to take it. He willingly supplied a letter of introduction to that firm's literary adviser, Mr. John Forster of the *Examiner*, who was then living in Lincoln's Inn Fields, but was away from home, also, the first time that Cooper called. The persevering author left his manuscript, and promised to return in a few days. When he did so the biographer of Landor and Dickens, whom Cooper describes as "a stout severe-looking man," received him somewhat coolly. Apparently a mutual dislike sprang up between the two from their first meeting. Cooper naturally had no great love for lawyers, and here was one who talked to him not as a poor literary aspirant, but like a bitter whig examining a poor Chartist at the bar. "He seemed not to hear anything I said," Cooper complains, "unless it was in answer to one of his lawyer-like questions; and

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<sup>10</sup> Four years later, in an open letter addressed to Disraeli, Cooper wrote: "When I left prison with the manuscript of my 'Purgatory' in my hand you received me handsomely; and you strove most generously to aid the introduction of my 'Prison Rhyme' to the reading world. Your efforts were unsuccessful, but they were earnest, and demand my lasting gratitude and respect." *Plain Speaker*, May 19, 1849.

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, p. 268.

he usually interrupted me if I spoke before he put another question to me.”<sup>12</sup> When Forster remarked, “I suppose you have no objection to alter the title you give yourself; I certainly should advise you to strike ‘the Chartist’ out,” Cooper replied positively, “Nay sir, I shall *not* strike it out. Mr. Disraeli advised me not to let anyone persuade me to strike it out; and I mean to abide by his advice.”<sup>13</sup> Forster made no reply to this outburst, but, frowning, said he would supply the desired letter to Chapman and Hall. Regarding the *Purgatory*, Cooper quotes him as saying, “There can be no question as to the excellence of your poetry, but I do not know how far it may be advisable for Messrs. Chapman and Hall to connect themselves with your Chartism.” Cooper’s observation, “I could not see that any publisher would necessarily connect himself with my Chartism by publishing my poem,”<sup>14</sup> is, of course, quite true; nevertheless it was unfortunate that he should have antagonized a man whose good-will might have assisted him materially, but who instead proved, on this and subsequent occasions, a determined obstacle to his progress. For although Chapman and Hall were at first greatly interested in his work, and asked him to submit the manuscript not only of his *Prison Rhyme*, but of the romance and tales as well, they returned them to the discomfited author at the end of a week, declining the poem and romance, but stating “they *perhaps* might take the tales if [he] could wait until some volumes they were then issuing, or were about to issue, in a series were published.”<sup>15</sup> Cooper was probably right in his surmise that his work had been submitted to Forster for his opinion, and that it had been unfavorable. He admits that on this occasion he was deeply disappointed, “for the eager interest with which Messrs. Chapman and Hall first received me \* \* \* had rendered me sanguine that they would really become my publish-

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, p. 269.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 270.

ers" <sup>16</sup> Eight years later they did, in fact, bring out the third edition of the *Purgatory of Suicides*.

Cooper seemed now to have received a final check to his hope of finding a publisher in London. But at this juncture Feargus O'Connor, whose jealousy of Cooper had previously caused an estrangement between them, unexpectedly came forward with an offer of assistance. Before discussing this development, however, it is necessary to explain the circumstances which led up to this unlooked-for kindness.

During the two years that Cooper was in prison O'Connor had succeeded in making himself absolute dictator of the National Chartist Association. But it soon became evident that Chartism was quietly but steadily dwindling away, partly because of O'Connor's having driven out all who refused to recognize his supreme authority, but pre-eminently because of the improved condition of the working classes with the return of slightly better times, which set in just about the time that Cooper entered Stafford prison. "Chartism," writes one of its historians, "was the creed of hard times, and it was unlucky for O'Connor and his plans that between 1842 and 1845 there was a wave of comparative prosperity that made those who profited by it forget the distress that had been so widespread between 1836 and 1842." <sup>17</sup>

O'Connor began to look about for some new issue to arouse his followers and to recruit Chartism's wanng ranks. He found what he wanted in his famous Land Scheme, by which impecunious industrial workers were to be transformed into independent and prosperous small farmers. This was to be accomplished by the purchase and division into four-acre farms of selected estates purchased

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Hovell, M., *Op. cit.*, p. 274. Slosson confirms this: "Neither the Chartists nor the Anti-Corn Law League won many recruits after the stormy days of 1842. But the Chartists suffered much more than the League, since they lacked the financial resources to keep their propaganda alive during the period of comparative public indifference." *Op. cit.* p. 80.

with the weekly installments paid by the workers for shares in a Chartist Co-operative Land Company. From these workmen subscribers a certain number were to be chosen by lot to occupy the first farms purchased. All holdings were to be cultivated by hand labor, principally as truck gardens. The crops of potatoes, turnips, cabbages, etc. raised on these four-acre holdings, O'Connor estimated, could be sold at a profit of more than three hundred pounds annually. If this amount were reduced two-thirds, there still remained an absolute profit of one hundred pounds per annum for each farm, out of which the tenant was to pay the Land Company an annual rental of five per cent on its capital outlay. With this income the Land Company would purchase additional land, which would furnish more farms; and so on, theoretically, until every subscriber had received a four-acre property. O'Connor prophesied that within twenty years of the inauguration of his plan there would be twenty million former factory hands living as contented farmers on their own land.

The impracticability of the scheme was apparent to the level-headed from the beginning, but the magic of Irish eloquence combined with detailed figures in the *Northern Star* showing the exact amount in pounds, shillings, and pence which might unquestionably be obtained by the sale of crops and of domestic animals and their products, served to convince thousands of working men that it was entirely feasible. So rapidly were the shares subscribed for, once the new company got under way, that the total of subscriptions jumped from £22,000 on December 7, 1846, to approximately £80,000, divided amongst 42,000 subscribers, by November of the following year. As the farms were distributed by lot it was possible for a lucky subscriber to obtain his four acres after paying in only a few weeks' installments on his shares. Six estates were actually purchased and broken up into small allotments before the scheme collapsed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For the full story see Hovell, M., *Op. cit.*, pp. 267-284; West, J., *Op. cit.*, pp. 206-224; Stosson, P. W., *Op. cit.*, pp. 84-93.

Cooper [and others also] charged O'Connor with financial irregularities, but the House of Commons committee which in 1848 investigated the affairs of the Land Company, exonerated him, ruling that although the Company's accounts had been kept with great irregularity, such laxity had been against O'Connor's interests, and not in his favor.

There was fierce opposition to the Land Plan from the beginning on the part of most of the leaders whom O'Connor had read out of the party. O'Brien denounced it unmeasuredly in the *National Reformer*. Even within the Chartist ranks there were doubters at first. It was not until the Conference of 1845, held in London in April and attended by only fourteen delegates, six representing London districts, that the Chartist Land Co-operative Society could be organized. Once the party was committed, O'Connor did everything possible to make the Land Plan succeed, and his plausibility, sanguine temperament, personal popularity, energy, and oratorical powers were sufficient to launch the scheme successfully, and to keep it afloat for a considerable period.

Remembering Cooper's former popularity, and realizing the value of his backing of the new plan, O'Connor set about effecting a reconciliation with him. Though Feargus seems to have been habitually suspicious of the opposition of imprisoned Chartists after their release, he had real grounds for suspicion in this instance, for, as he showed Cooper, he had received

several letters from Chartists for whom I had done acts of kindness at considerable cost to myself. I was astonished at what I read. Such a twisting of minute, unimportant facts, and skill in misinterpreting my motives! I could not have thought the writers capable of such ingenious and profitless wickedness if I had not known the writing.<sup>20</sup>

The temporary reconciliation between the two men was brought about by Dougal Macgowan, who had printed

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, p. 273. O'Connor described these documents as "two reports," the first signed by Duffy and forty-eight other Chartists; the other "from another group, asking that Chartism be saved from Mr. Cooper." *Northern Star*, June 13, 1846.

the *Kentish Mercury* in 1840 when Cooper was its editor, and was now printer for the *Northern Star*, which had moved the previous year from Leeds to London.<sup>20</sup> Cooper states that Macgowan told him that O'Connor was sorry for having written against him, and would apologize for it if Cooper would call on him at his lodgings in Great Marlborough street. Cooper replied that since O'Connor had not signified his recantation in the *Northern Star* he would not see him. About a week later he again met Macgowan, who was once more urgent that Cooper call to receive O'Connor's explanations. From this point the account in the autobiography differs slightly from that given in Cooper's letter of 1849, quoted below, which is doubtless the more correct, and which I therefore follow. Suffice it to say that Cooper did call upon O'Connor, and was invited to bring his poem and read it aloud. When he did so O'Connor was so impressed with the work that he swore *he* would publish it, and ordered Macgowan to commence setting it up in type.

It was not long, however, before O'Connor dropped poetry for politics. Then when Cooper called he was sure to hear an enthusiastic exposition of the Land Scheme, coupled with a plea for him to become one of its advocates. "But," Cooper writes, "I told him I could not; and I begged of him to give the Scheme up, for I felt sure that it would bring ruin and disappointment upon himself and all who entered into it. He did not grow angry with me at first, but tried to win me by assurances of his esteem and regard, and of his kindly intention to me. I could not, however, be won; for all he said in explication of his scheme only served to render it wilder and worse in my estimation."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The decline in Chartist numbers is strikingly shown by the circulation figures of the *Star*. Founded in 1837 at the beginning of the hard times, it reached its maximum influence in 1839 when it sold 35,559 copies a week. From that time it steadily declined until by 1844, when it moved to London its circulation was less than 9000 copies a week.

<sup>21</sup> *Life*, pp. 273-274.

After printing the first four books of the Prison Rhyme Macgowan suggested to Cooper that they take copies of the parts already in type to some of the London publishers, and endeavor to persuade one of them to sponsor the work, as it had become evident that O'Connor could not carry it through. At Cooper's desire they called first upon Chapman and Hall, but again Edward Chapman declined to take it. As Cooper was walking homeward feeling considerably downcast, at Temple Bar he bumped into John Cleave.<sup>22</sup> As Cooper had purchased many of the periodicals formerly sold in his Leicester coffee-shop from Cleave and the latter had published the memoir of Ellis in his *English Chartist Circular*, the two were old acquaintances. When the bookseller asked why he looked so unhappy Cooper replied, "I owe you three-and-thirty pounds, and a deal of money to others; and I cannot find a publisher for my book."<sup>23</sup> Cleave bade him to cheer up, and said he would give him a note to Douglas Jerrold, who, he said would find him a publisher if anyone could. The promised letter was written immediately at Cleave's shop in Shoe Lane and handed over to Cooper with full directions for finding Jerrold's house on Putney Common. The energetic poet at once set off to deliver the note together with his manuscript and printed pages; saw Mrs. Jerrold; and arranged to call for his answer in three or four days.

When he saw Jerrold at the time appointed the bright-eyed little cripple received him most cordially, pressed food and drink upon him, declared his poetry was manly and noble, and assured him a publisher would be found without further delay. He informed Cooper that Charles Dickens who had read the manuscript was so impressed by it that he had taken it off home with him. As soon

<sup>22</sup> John Cleave was one of the pioneers in the Chartist movement; and in the fight for an unstamped press he proved one of Hetherington's strongest allies. Hovell says that "he was less refined, and perhaps less able than his three colleagues Lovett, Hetherington, and Watson, but he was a capable and fluent speaker of courage and conviction."

<sup>23</sup> Life, p. 275.

as he got it back Jerrold said he would take it into town, and see about obtaining a publisher for it.<sup>24</sup> The kindly humorist was as good as his word, for a few days later Cooper received a letter directing him to call upon Jeremiah How, a publisher of "popular novelties."<sup>25</sup> How, who was located at 132 Fleet street, had no objection to sponsoring a Chartist poem, and at once accepted the manuscript and books in type for publication over his name. Because of the growing coolness of O'Connor, who now either denied Cooper admittance when he called, or was unpleasant about his steady refusal to help with the Land Scheme,<sup>26</sup> our author was anxious to be quit of further obligation to him, and persuaded How to give Macgowan an acceptance for the printing, binding, and paper of five hundred copies, the number to be issued as a first edition. The whole story of O'Connor's part in bringing out his poem Cooper related three years later in a characteristically lengthy communication, called forth by certain statements which O'Connor had made as the result of a libelous letter written against Cooper by a Bolton mischief-maker.<sup>27</sup> Answering O'Connor's statements of the previous week, and rebutting the charge of ingratitude, Cooper wrote to his former idol in part as follows:

You say "he gave me a bill for £36 5s. which was dishonored and [has] never yet been paid except in unmitigated abuse." You know that *I never gave you a bill in my life*, either for the sum you mention or for any other sum \* \* \* and as for "unmitigated abuse" I have never dealt in it, either towards you or any other person.

You say, "The poet waited upon me with his child under his arm, and told me he had waited upon Disraeli, Douglas Jerrold, Dickens, and several other literary celebrities, in the hope of receiving their assistance to bring out his poem. He told me they all gave him fair words, but added with tears in his eyes, that I

<sup>24</sup> *Life*, p. 276. The whole episode is reproduced verbatim from the autobiography in *Douglas Jerrold, Dramatist and Wit* [vol. ii, pp. 414 f.] a biography written by Jerrold's son Walter.

<sup>25</sup> Cooper lists Mrs. S. C. Hall's *Ireland and Its Scenery*, the *Book of British ballads*, and Jerrold's *Cakes and Ale*, as samples of his list.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, p. 277.

<sup>27</sup> *Northern Star*, April 7, 1849.

was his only hope. His tears softened my heart and opened my pocket. I gave him an order upon a printer to print and bind paper at my expense," and then follows your statement about the bill—concluding your account of your own conduct and mine; but which account I must, if you please, render into a true version.

I did not "wait upon you with my child under my arm." Some weeks after my liberation from Stafford Gaol, my friend and former acquaintance Mr. Macgowan desired me to call upon you. I told him you had used me ill, having denounced me while I lay in prison; and that although you had withdrawn some of your charges against me publicly—yet you had *not* withdrawn your untrue charge about my having had your money; and until you displayed honour enough to do so I would not call upon you. Mr. M'G. assured me in return that you had charged him to request me to call upon you; that you respected me highly, and that all would be explained if I would call. Upon these assurances I called upon you; but I had *not* my poem with me. I came with no idea of showing it to you. You sprang up when I intimated that I expected your explanation, and said we would have none—you were glad to see me—and we would be friends again. We did, however, enter into some explanation \* \* \* and I acquitted you from the charge of culpability in a great degree when you showed me a calumnious letter signed by persons to whom my conduct had been as kind and open as theirs was unkind and underhand. I gave you my hand and therewith my heart. My nature is not vindictive; \* \* \* you had my attachment again. It might not be worth much—but I gave it sincerely; and that without any thought of ever deriving any worldly or pecuniary advantage from you.

I sat with you some time, and at length I told you I had called upon Mr. Duncombe to thank him for his kind and persevering attention to my cause in Parliament; and how he had given me an introduction to Mr. Disraeli. I then told you of Mr. Disraeli's kind reception of me, and of his persevering attempts to get a publisher for my "Purgatory"—all of which failed. I did not tell you I had "waited upon Douglas Jerrold, Dickens, several other literary characters, etc." I had not then seen either Mr. Jerrold or Mr. Dickens. This I am conscious is just a *mistake*, and not an intentional *untruth* on *your part*. You are confounding several conversation in one. I have often known you to do this; but I set it down to you *not* as a fault, but as the result of multifarious business confusing your mind. Therein you are only like other men. I did *not* tell you that only "fair words" were given me by any literary man; this expression was applied to the fashionable publishers to whom I had been recommended by Mr. Disraeli. That again is merely a slip of the

memory on your part. I did *not* "add with tears in my eyes that *you* were my only hope." I had no hope whatever in you—no expectation whatever as regarded my poem. Nor did I shed a single tear in the interview. I was not at all in a dolorous mood. A reconciliation had taken place with one to whom I had been formerly strongly attached, and anyone who has the least kindness in his constitution can understand that the heart is not much disposed to melancholy at such seasons. \* \* \*

You pressed me to come and breakfast with you the next morning, and to bring my poem with me that you might hear me read some of it. I did so; and now *I wept* while reading the stanzas in the third book which referred to my dear mother; and *you wept* while listening to them. I took it to be a proof of your right feeling; and I do not think that either you or I have any need to be ashamed of our weeping together on that occasion. You say that my tears softened your heart. I am glad of it. May the tender influence ever remain with you. But you add—"and opened my pocketbook." I beg your pardon, sir; indeed I had no such magic influence upon you; and the "open sesame" would have had little value if I had possessed the secret—for your pocket, as I learnt from your own confession soon after, had little or nothing in it about that time.

The following morning I breakfasted with you again—for you would not be said "Nay;" and again you sat a long time to hear me read passages from my "Purgatory." You frequently exclaimed "Equal to Milton! Sublime!" and I know not what besides; and at the conclusion of that sitting you swore [forgive me but it is a fact!] that *you* would *publish* my poem. I jeered at what you said; for I thought it absurd at the moment. But you repeated it with the same orthodox emphasis. I asked you *how* you would or could publish it; and you replied it did not matter—you *would* publish it, and I should see that you would.

You say, "I gave him an order upon a printer to print and find paper at my expense." You know that is a mis-statement. You *never* gave me any such order. Mr. M'Gowan told me some days after my first interview with you that I was to bring my manuscript to him, for you had given him an order to print it. I sought you out again and asked you what you meant. You replied "that you would print the book and find a publisher for it—you would bring it out—did I suppose you were mocking me?" You spoke angrily, as if you were hurt at my questions; and I could not doubt your sincerity—so thanked you and withdrew.

When about half the poem was printed, Mr. M'Gowan said I had better call upon you and remind you that it was time a publisher was found, and \* \* \* advertisements began to appear announce-

ing the poem. You said "Good morning, Mr. Milton," in your jocular way as I entered the room; but your behaviour was utterly changed when I told you of my errand. You told me that *I* must find a publisher, for you could not, and as for advertising, you could *not* advertise the book; it must advertise itself. I felt so shocked by this answer that I could only answer you with difficulty; but I told you, you had brought me into difficulty. You saw I was hurt; and you immediately softened your tone, and said to me with a look of distress that I shall never forget, "Cooper, I have not the money to do it! I declare to you if I could afford to pay for the five hundred copies and give them away, I would. However, I will undertake to dispose of two hundred copies for you by some means or other. But I have not the money to advertise for you. I declare to you that I often know what it is to dine upon sixpence. I often go and get a basin of soup, and have nothing more, because I cannot afford a dinner." Your words distressed me; but more on your account than on my own. I replied, Mr. O'Connor, I cannot expect you to do what I have asked under such circumstances; but I am sorry you have placed me in such a predicament."

After such a confession from you I easily understood why Mr. M'Gowan presented me with a written *memorandum*, which he requested me to sign—observing that he had drawn it up at *your* request, and that you had said Cooper would have no objection to signing it. By this paper Mr. M'Gowan and I became the contracting parties; and you were thenceforth excluded in my mind from responsibility. A copy of the document will show that I could have no other thought after signing it.

I remarked to Mr. M'Gowan on signing this document, "You now take my responsibility instead of Mr. O'Connor's; and I am better pleased that it is so. My only doubt remains about finding a publisher to take a printed book; and how is it to be advertised?" Mr. M'Gowan replied that *he* could not advertise it, but he would go with me in search of a publisher. We went a few days afterwards to a publisher in the Strand, and tried our luck, but found none \* \* \*. On leaving him [Macgowan] I met with my friend John Cleave, and seeing me look thoughtful he asked me what was the matter with me. I told him my difficulty, and he immediately offered to give me an introduction to Mr. Jerrold, that I might ask his aid in getting a publisher. Mr. Jerrold received me like a brother, showed the half of my poem which was printed to Mr. Dickens [who afterwards received me in the same fraternal spirit] and then used his interest with Mr. How, who consented to publish my poem, and as-

sured me with the greatest kindness that he would undertake the expense of advertising it.

Overjoyed, I paid you another visit, told you how Jerrold had received me, and of the prospects that were opening. I felt no unkindly spirit within me towards you. I considered that you had proposed at first to do more than you were able to do; and I respected you for your good purposes. \* \* \*

When my poem was brought out, and the nobly generous review of it appeared in the *Britannia* I told you the news, and you seemed pleased and gratified, and I believed you sincere. But when I asked you about the two hundred copies you said, "No, I only said one hundred," and laughed. I laughed likewise, for I felt sure that such a notice as that in the paper just mentioned would cause a speedy sale of the first edition; and so it fell out. You afterwards backed out of your promise altogether, and refused to take even a single copy. But I care nothing about that. The publisher, encouraged by the sale of the first few days, offered to take the whole edition, and Mr. M'Gowan consented to it. I was discharged by Mr. M'G. from my part of the *agreement* with him, and thenceforth the whole affair became a matter of business between him and my publishers. The latter paid him his bill of £40 19s. for *printing* the five hundred copies; but the bill for the paper Mr. M'Gowan said he could not furnish until he had it from *your* stationer, the Messrs. Venables, by whom the paper had been supplied. Mr. How told me this, but neither he nor I had the slightest suspicion that you had anything to do with it \* \* \*. When at length the account for the paper [about £50] was sent to Mr. How, he considered himself as indebted to Mr. M'Gowan, not to *you*, for it. Afterwards Mr. How \* \* \* gave Mr. M'Gowan an acceptance which it seems included the cost of paper and advertisements, amounting to £26 5s. When you first announced this acceptance had been dishonored I was uneasy about it; and went to Mr. M'Gowan to tell him that though I had not received any profit from the sale of the five hundred copies, if he would procure me the returned bill, I would borrow money and discharge it.<sup>28</sup>

It is obvious, of course, that once Macgowan had accepted the publisher How's note for the debt, Cooper was absolved of all responsibility, both to Macgowan and to O'Connor. As How's publishing business had failed, and he was unable to pay, Macgowan was forced to look to O'Connor for payment, unless he chose to accept Cooper's

<sup>28</sup> *Northern Star*, April 28, 1849.

offer to pay, even though he was in no way responsible. Under the circumstances it is easy to see that the printer of the *Northern Star* was compelled to support the proprietor of the *Northern Star* in his claim that the money was owed to him, and that he had been the security for the printing.

The *Purgatory of Suicides* came out towards the end of August 1845 and the whole edition was exhausted before Christmas. Cooper reaped no profit from this fact, however, for although How had talked of five hundred pounds for the copyright, money troubles made it impossible for him to pay anything. How's eventual bankruptcy seems to have been due partly to his poor judgment as a publisher and partly to the failure of the wealthy printer on whom he leaned, and from whom he had expected long credit.<sup>29</sup>

When Cooper called upon him in June 1846 to discuss the prospects for a second edition of the poem, the publisher begged for time, asserting that his affairs would mend, and asked Cooper not to offer the second edition elsewhere. Cooper complied with the request, and in consequence the book was out of print for a full year. It was not until 1847 that arrangements were finally made with James Watson, Chartist bookseller and publisher, to bring out a second edition of the poem.

At the close of 1845, however, Cooper's prospects seemed rosy. His publisher was genuinely desirous of pushing his new author's fortunes, and incidentally his own, and within ten weeks of the appearance of the *Purgatory* he [in November 1845] brought before the public the group of tales which Cooper had written in prison. These were issued in two volumes under the title of *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*, a name of How's invention, which Cooper thoroughly disliked, and which he changed to *Old-Fashioned Stories* when a re-issue of the tales was called

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<sup>29</sup> *Life*, p. 280.

for in 1875. For *Wise Saws*, How paid the author thirty-two pounds, the only money Cooper ever received from him.

The new publication was dedicated to Douglas Jerrold. All of the sketches in the first volume, and three of those in the second, were based on Lincolnshire memories. As the work is rare, a brief description of its contents may be of interest.

The first story in the initial volume demonstrates that a theoretical believer in equality may not always be able to live up to his convictions. The second, about a poacher, questions the justice of the game laws, but shows the folly of defying them. The third sketch relates how cheerfulness, honesty, and hard work bring a poor tailor to good fortune, and how hypocrisy and dishonesty ruin his well-to-do rival. The next tale illustrates strikingly how different the attitude of the English is towards change and improvement from what it is in this country. Two character sketches follow: the first presenting a blind old fiddler and his fisherman crony; the second a learned but simple-minded village schoolmaster of the first of the century. The seventh piece is a "Man-of-Feeling" type of story, which concludes with a moralizing essay. "The History of Cockle Tom", as previously shown, is a fictionized account of Cooper's sailor uncle. "The Last Days of an Old Sailor" describes the miserable work-house end of one of Nelson's old sea-dogs; and the concluding piece of this first volume is an anecdote of a dairy-woman's piety.

The second volume opens with an account of the Old Corporation of Lincoln. A melodramatic "Story of a Father's Sacrifice of his Child at the Shrine of Mammon" is next, and this is followed by three sketches based upon personal experiences. The first and last of these, which set forth in fictional dress the author's London adventure and his brief connection with the *Kentish Mercury* have been previously discussed; the second describes a lad's mis-haps at an inn frequented by a group of old-fashioned commercial travelers. A dialogue between a pair of representative citizens of Lincoln comes next, apparently designed

to personify the differences between the old Tory and the new Liberal. "Signs of the Times" is a burlesque account of the troubles of a domineering cleric with his rebellious parishioners, based on fact, which was originally published in 1838 in the *Stamford Mercury*. The two sketches and story which follow it were the fruit of the writer's experiences at Leicester, and may be summed up in the title of one of them: "Merrie England—No More." The eleventh piece is an Oliver Twist sort of tale of an apprentice who comes to a bad end because of the sour-godliness of his master. The last two chapters preserve all that Cooper ever wrote of his projected autobiographical novel.

All these pieces except the last three were written during confinement in Stafford Gaol "as a relief from the intenser thought exercised in the composition of the 'Prison Rhyme.'" The author claimed for them "no higher merit than naturalness combined with truth," and explained that "nearly all the homely character sketches are real,—some of them in their very names; and the few adventures allotted to them are devoid of romance and intricacy because they seldom exceed fact."<sup>30</sup> The principal defects of Cooper's style here are over-abundant moralizing, over-fondness for uncouth character names, affectation of obsolete phraseology, and tiresome repetition of catch-words. The writing is, however, always vigorous and homely, and sometimes pleasantly humorous. While the sketches have little, if any, literary value, they are interesting for their pictures of the old Lincolnshire which disappeared with the coming of the railways, and also for their brace of realistic descriptions of Leicestershire in the 1840's. These latter made use of incidents which Cooper had related at the time of his trials, and was to repeat in his autobiography. When these simple stories were re-issued thirty years later Cooper was rejoiced to note that "the misery outlined in two or three painfully-veritable picture of the Leicestershire stockingers has [van-

<sup>30</sup> Preface to *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*.

ished] prosperity of trade and a more equitable state of wages having banished it—let us hope—for ever!"<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the fact that the prison poem had appeared in August, and the prose tales in November, How urged the issuing of a Christmas Book, and Cooper agreed to furnish one provided it might be in rhyme. But publication was delayed until the middle of January 1846, so that the book missed the market for which it had been prepared. A much lighter volume than the *Purgatory*, both physically and intellectually, it was attractively printed, and illustrated with good engravings.

The *Baron's Yule Feast*, as the new work was called, was dedicated, at the suggestion of the publisher, to Lady Blessington,<sup>32</sup> in an irregular sonnet which tactfully began:

Lady, receive a tributary lay  
From one who cringeth not to titled state.

The foundation of this little volume was a youthful piece, "The Daughter of Plantagenet," which, like the other interpolated songs, had been written at Lincoln nearly a decade earlier, "the fruit," Cooper tells us, "of impressions derived from the local associations of boyhood \* \* \* and of an admiration created by the exquisite beauty and simplicity of 'Christabel.'"<sup>33</sup> In the *Baron's Yule Feast* the irregular stanzas of Coleridge's poem are imitated in a rime scheme prevailingly *aabccb*, the third and sixth lines containing, as a rule, three feet, and the others four. Trochaic lines are frequently inserted into the prevailingly iambic pattern and anapests or dactyls substituted for feet of two syllables. The selection of a medieval subject was also due to Coleridgian influence.

The setting of a Yule celebration of the olden times allows the introduction of different lays by the minstrel, and of various songs by the different members of the com-

<sup>31</sup> Preface to *Old-Fashioned Stories*.

<sup>32</sup> For an authoritative account of the tragic vicissitudes which marked the life of this ill-starred woman, see Michael Sadlier's brilliantly written biography *The Strange Life of Lady Blessington*.

<sup>33</sup> Preface to *The Baron's Yule Feast*.

pany. "The Daughter of Plantagenet" which is the first of the lays sung by the minstrel is a romantic tale of treachery and tragic love, inspired partly by the old ruins of Torksey, and partly by the Lincolnshire tradition that in one of the tower rooms of the old hall in Gainsborough, "in consequence of her perverse attachment to her father's foe," John of Gaunt had starved his daughter to death. The minstrel's second lay, "Sir Raymond and the False Palmer," is an inartistic rendering of the hackneyed incident of a crusading knight returning home on the eve of his faithless wife's marriage to his foe. There are also songs by the woodman, gosherd, lay-brother, and swineherd. This last song—a poor one—celebrates the swineherd commemorated on the west facade of Lincoln Cathedral because of his gift to the minster of a wine-horn filled with silver pennies. The two best songs were later set to music by Sophia Dobson Collett, and published by James Watson. Miss Collett credits the melody as well as the words to Cooper.<sup>34</sup>

The liveliest piece of the whole collection, doggerel ditty though it be, is the lay-brother's song, "The Miller of Roche," which relates the story of a beggar-lad, who after preliminary reconnaissance through a crack in the door is able, when the miller's wife refuses him food, to conjure forth from an old chest a brace of roast ducks, with bread and wine, and from the huge copper kettle in the kitchen the Devil himself, in the shape of the Prior of Roche. This "tale of the Lincolnshire fireside" Cooper says he never saw in print "until Mr. Dickens \* \* \* pointed out to me a similar story in the *Decameron*."<sup>35</sup> Description of the Christmas celebration in the baron's hall, including the bringing in of the yule-log on Christmas eve, and a Gargantuan feast for all on Christmas day, affords a framework within which the various songs and lays are

\* *Two Songs from the Baron's Yule Feast*, "No. I The Minstrel's Song \* \* \* No. II The Woodman's Song," the poetry and melody by Thomas Cooper, arranged by Sophia Dobson Collett, London [James Watson \* \* \* Entered at Stationers Hall] n. d.

<sup>34</sup> *Baron's Yule Feast*, Note 12.

easily fitted. The Middle Ages here portrayed is not that of history, but the chivalrous and romantic ideal of the Middle Ages which has enchanted so many generous hearts: a time when—

breasts though rude  
Glowed with the warmth of brotherhood  
For all who toiled, through youth and age,  
To enrich their force-won heritage.\*

The poet—

Would the homely truth proclaim  
That times which knaves full loudly blame  
For feudal haughtiness  
Would put the grinding crew to shame  
Who prey on [our] distress.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously the *Baron's Yule Feast* is a mere mélange of literary reminiscences and influences. This is its fatal defect, that it is never anything except "literary," the breath of life and of genuine feeling being entirely lacking except in a few of the purely personal passages. Many of the book's deficiencies are due to the fact that nearly all the pieces composing it were the juvenile work of ten years earlier, before their author had learned to cast aside the mere trappings of literature.

The book was noticed in *Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, whose reviewer urged the poet to give up such worn-out themes, and to write instead about the poor as they actually were, "with all their good and bad qualities; unvarnished, undisguised, but developed faithfully and fully"—in short that he become an earlier George Gissing. According to this reviewer:

The poor [that is nine-tenths of the population] has never yet been truly represented as regards their characteristics, opinions, or condition. We know as little of their real state as [we do of] the tribes of Africa, perhaps less. Yet here is one of themselves who has power of utterance, and speaks not of them, but of matters already exhausted.\*

\* Canto iii, st. 2.

\*\* Canto iii, st. 3-4.

\* *Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, xiv; 189 [February, 1846].

Having missed its proper market, the *Yule Feast* did not sell particularly well. Nearly four years later the *Reasoner* reported that Mr. Watson had added this title to the other works of Cooper published by him,<sup>39</sup> but as there is no record of any second edition this probably refers to Watson's having acquired the unsold remainder of the first edition. Cooper received nothing from How for this work either.

Of these three earliest publications only the *Purgatory of Suicides* is of importance, and that book today is merely a literary curiosity. While Cooper seemed to be, at long last, launched upon a career as author, his books brought him no return at all in two instances, and only an insignificant sum in the third. Poor as the "Prison Rhyme" is, it remains his most solid achievement, for although he continued to write, constant struggle for a livelihood never allowed him to complete any work more worthy of his powers.

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<sup>39</sup> *Reasoner*, August 8, 1849.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PACIFIST LECTURES

Amongst those to whom the *Purgatory of Suicides* introduced Cooper was William Howitt, then well-known as an editor and writer, who followed up his favorable review of that poem with two articles on its author for his own periodical, *Howitt's Journal*;<sup>1</sup> Douglas Jerrold, who accepted one of the prison sketches for the July issue of *Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*;<sup>2</sup> and Charles Dickens, "with whom," Cooper states, "I afterwards corresponded, and for one of whose periodicals I wrote a little."<sup>3</sup>

But "the most illustrious man of genius" to whom his poem procured him an introduction was Thomas Carlyle, to whom he dedicated the Prison Rhyme in a sonnet composed a few days before he left prison.<sup>4</sup> Upon receipt of a presentation copy of the book Carlyle sent Cooper the following letter, which exhibits a tactful consideration of his admirer's feelings:

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<sup>1</sup> "Poets of the People—Thomas Cooper," *Howitt's Journal*, III: 226 and 242-247.

<sup>2</sup> "Crinkum Crankum, the Man Who Went Straightforward Down Crooked Lane." In the autobiography Cooper erroneously states that his contribution was "Charity Begins At Home." [Both sketches may be found in *Old-Fashioned Stories*.] His mistake in this connection suggests the possibility of his being similarly mistaken when he further asserts that for Jerrold's monthly he also "wrote a few other things in prose and verse." [Life, p. 279] The sketch mentioned is the only work of his that a search of the files of the magazine has disclosed.

<sup>3</sup> *Life*, p. 282. I have not been able to discover any such articles, but since contributions to *Household Words* were published without the name of the author, Cooper may have written for this periodical.

<sup>4</sup> 'To Thomas Carlyle  
Right noble age-fellow, whose speech and thought  
Proclaims thee other than the supple throng  
Who glide Life's custom-smoothed path along,  
Prescription's easy slaves—strangers to doubt,  
Because they never think!—a lay untaught

Chelsea, September 1, 1845

Dear Sir,

I have received your Poem; and will thank you for that kind gift, and for all the friendly sentiments you entertain towards me,—which, as from an evidently sincere man, whatever we may think of them otherwise, are surely valuable to a man.

I have looked into your Poem, and find indisputable traces of genius in it,—a dark 'Titanic energy struggling there, for which we hope there will be clearer daylight by-and-by!' If I might presume to advise, I think I would recommend you to try your next work in *Prose*, and as a thing turning altogether on *Facts*, not *Fiction*. Certainly the *music* that is very traceable here might serve to irradiate into harmony far profitabler things than any which are commonly called 'Poems,'—for which, at any rate, the taste in these days seems to be irrevocably in abeyance. We have too horrible Practical Chaos around us; out of which every man is called by the birth of him to make a bit of *Cosmos*: that seems to me the real poem for a man,—especially at present. I always grudge to see any portion of man's *musical talent* [which is the real intellect, the real vitality, or life of him] expended on making mere *words rhyme*. These things I say to all my Poetic friends,—for I am in real earnest about them: but get almost nobody to believe me hitherto. From you I shall get an excuse at any rate; the purpose of my so speaking being a friendly one towards you.

I will request you farther to accept this book of mine,<sup>5</sup> and to appropriate what you can of it. "Life is a serious thing,"<sup>6</sup> as Schiller says, and as you yourself practically know! These are the words of a serious man about it; they will not altogether be without meaning for you.

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I offer thee. Receive the humble song—  
 A tribute of the feeble to the strong  
 Of inward ken—for that the theme is fraught  
 With dreams of Reason's high enfranchisement.  
 Illustrious Schiller's limner, unto thee  
 Mind's freedom must be precious,—or what lent  
 His toil its light, and what fires thine? The free  
 Of soul with quenchless zeal must ever glow  
 To spread the freedom their own minds know.

Stafford Gaol,  
 May 3, 1845

<sup>5</sup> An autographed copy of *Past and Present*, first published during the previous year.

<sup>6</sup> "Ernst ist das Leben" is the motto of *Past and Present*.

Unfortunately I am just in these hours getting out of town; and, not without real regret, must deny myself the satisfaction of seeing you at present.

Believe me to be,

With many good wishes,

Yours very truly,

T. CARLYLE<sup>7</sup>

The typical Carlyle touch about the duty of every man to convert the practical chaos around him into a bit of Cosmos echoes a phrase used about a year earlier [August 5, 1844] in a letter to Emerson, when Carlyle described Tennyson as "a man \* \* \* dwelling in an element of gloom \* \* \* carrying a bit of Chaos about him \* \* \* which he is manufacturing into Cosmos."<sup>8</sup>

The publication of his poem also led to Cooper's becoming acquainted with W. E. Forster, at this date still a young man. Forster, who was a great admirer of the Sage of Chelsea, visited Carlyle at his home during the spring of 1846, and Carlyle called his attention to the *Purgatory of Suicides* and lent him the book. Forster was so impressed by the work that he sought out its author, and the friendship which commenced between them at that time endured until Forster's death.<sup>9</sup>

One of the best known orators of the day, W. J. Fox,<sup>10</sup> made the poem the subject of one of his popular Sunday

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>8</sup> *Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Boston, 1883, ii:66. Carlyle had also advised Tennyson to abandon verse.

<sup>9</sup> Forster was twenty-eight and Cooper forty-one in 1846. Forster's biographer states that the two men met for the first time at a breakfast given in May 1846 by Forster in London, at which Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Buxton were also present. During the summer Cooper seems to have called upon Forster in Bradford, where the latter was in the wool-stapling business. Vide Reid, T. Wemyss, *Life of William Edward Forster* [2d edn] London, 1888, two vols., I:167-169.

<sup>10</sup> William Johnson Fox, whose biography was the last work of Richard Garnett, began his public career as a Unitarian preacher at the South Place Chapel, Finsbury. He was a man of varied accomplishments: Bright called him the "Orator of the Corn Law League"; he wrote editorials for the *Daily News* and dramatic criticism for the *Morning Chronicle*; and he was twice elected M. P. for Oldham. In literary history Fox is remembered for his *Monthly*

evening lectures at National Hall. He also did Cooper the substantial kindness of recommending him to the committee of that institution as a lecturer, and Cooper began an engagement there in this capacity at least as early as October, 1845. During that month William Ellis, Utilitarian and philanthropist,<sup>11</sup> accompanied him home at the conclusion of an address, and wrote him out a check on a Lombard Street bank for one hundred pounds.<sup>12</sup> This windfall Cooper paid away at once, sending thirty-three pounds to John Cleave for payment in full of his account; remitting a substantial payment to the lawyer who had assisted him at his first trial; and disbursing the balance principally in the payment of other smaller debts.

Carlyle too, Scotchman though he was, knew how to be generous with money. "Twice," Cooper acknowledges, "he put a five-pound note into my hand when I was in difficulties, and told me, with a look of grave humour, that if I could never pay him again he would not hang me."<sup>13</sup> Prior to his engagement in the summer of 1846 as special correspondent for *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, Cooper seems to have had no employment except the delivery of occasional lectures. He used some of his leisure time in 1845 for further study of French and Italian with Signor D'Albrione, continuing the lessons until his departure from London in July 1846.<sup>14</sup>

Cooper's engagement at National Hall,<sup>15</sup> launched him upon a decade of lecture work very similar to Fox's own,

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*Repository*, in which Browning's earliest work appeared. Other contributors were Leigh Hunt, R. H. Horne, and John Stuart Mill. In addition to publishing the earliest review, a favorable one, of Browning's "Pauline," Fox was one of the first to hail Tennyson's genius. Graham Wallas has analyzed the significance of Fox's career in his *Moncure Conway Memorial Lecture on W. J. Fox*.

<sup>11</sup> William Ellis was a successful and energetic man of business. He was a member of the Utilitarian Society founded by J. S. Mill, a body which never exceeded ten in number; and the founder of a number of Birkbeck Schools [i. e. Mechanics' Institutes].

<sup>12</sup> *Life*, p. 281.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 309.

<sup>15</sup> This institution was controlled by the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, an organization founded by William Lovett in 1840, shortly after his release from prison.

and for a time scarcely inferior to it in popularity with the working classes. The first of the National Hall lectures to receive publication were "Two Orations Against the Taking Away of Human Life under any Circumstances," presented on February 25 and March 4, 1846. These were not the first addresses he had given on this subject, however, for after his release from prison he had "on several occasions seen it right to speak strongly against the old Chartist error of physical force."<sup>16</sup> Amongst those who approved his new doctrine was W. H. Ashurst, Solicitor to the Post Office, who asked Lovett whether Cooper could not be persuaded to deliver two lectures on "moral force" as a special theme. The request resulted in the presentation and publication of the lectures mentioned. That a man who owed his imprisonment to his physical force Chartistism, who was so impulsive of temper that shortly after the appearance of these addresses he publicly dared O'Connor to personal combat, and who was throughout his life one of the most passionate and fiery and combative individuals who ever championed an unpopular cause, should have come forth as the advocate of absolute non-resistance is surprising; but it is impossible to read his plea and not believe that its author was absolutely sincere.<sup>17</sup> His acceptance of pacifism at this time seems to have developed largely as a revulsion against the hanging of six human beings in front of Stafford Gaol during the two years he was in prison.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Life*, p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> "His mental changes \* \* \* from ultra-scepticism to evangelical Christianity were startling. But he was always sincere—I may say with no injustice, intolerantly sincere \* \* \* His renunciations and adoptions were without ulterior aim of acquiring power, place, or pay." Julian Harney in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Purgatory of Suicides*, Book VI, Note 1. Cooper was interested in non-resistance as early as 1841, for in that year he printed in the *Illuminator* a quotation from the Rev. Samuel Johnson's *Reflections on the History of Passive Obedience*. The author, Cooper informed his readers, was "not the Tory Dr. Johnson, but the patriot Johnson, the chosen friend and domestic chaplain of Lord William Russell of law-murdered memory." *Midland Counties Illuminator*, May 15, 1841.

The "Two Orations Against the Taking Away of Human Life under Any Circumstances," whose general nature is indicated by the sub-title, "In explanation, and defence, of the misrepresented doctrine of non-resistance," were published by Chapman Brothers in 1846 as a paper-covered octavo pamphlet of fifty-six pages, which sold for a shilling. As this publication is now "excessively rare,"<sup>19</sup> I shall give a brief analysis of its contents.

The speaker began by commending a recent agitation urging working men to refuse to serve in the national militia, on the principle of "No vote—no musket." After a survey of the whole question of war, aggressive and defensive, and three year's reflection, he could find no firm ground for any other policy than denial of the propriety of any blood-shedding war whatsoever. His former advocacy of physical force had been induced, he declared, "by painful acquaintance with the deep daily suffering, the squalid want and raggedness, the woe and agony of starvation experienced by what are called 'the manufacturing masses.'" He refused, however, to apologize for having held such wrong ideas. On the contrary, when the most numerous and most toilful class suffer owing to the ill regulation of society, and "governments uphold the law whereby these faulty regulations are continued, bad governments must take the chief blame of the violent opinions, or the violent course of action, into which the suffering classes and those whose sympathies are naturally bound up with them, may fall."

Neither would he, "from a weak fear of losing reputation for consistency," apologize for exchanging old opinions for new ones. "Every man who thinks," he observed, "must change his opinions. \* \* \* Nothing ought to render us more suspicious of a private man's good sense than his assertion that he has held precisely the same opinions on

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<sup>19</sup> So endorsed by Professor E. R. A. Seligmann in his copy of the Cooper pamphlet. The publication is not in the British Museum Library, nor [so far as I know] in any American library except that of Columbia University which was so fortunate as to acquire the Seligmann collection.

all subjects through life. \* \* \* Every man's life-walk will be found to be more or less a zig-zag in its direction when closely and honestly traced."

The petitions which were then being circulated among Chartists for effecting the recall of Frost and his companions in the Newport uprising Cooper said he had suggested amending to include a statement that it was wrong to take human life, even in self-defence. He had also offered a similar amendment to the general motions against war at the anti-militia meetings. Feargus O'Connor, he stated, had denounced this amendment as "beastly, slavish, unmanly, cowardly, debasing, unchristian, and un-Chartist."

The wickedness of all aggressive warfare the lecturer held it unnecessary to debate. Englishmen who had to spend their lives toiling for bread had never had anything to fight for; and the toiling masses of other nations, being in a similar degraded condition, had likewise nothing to fight for. The war spirit had always been kindled by the evil masters of the poor for their own purposes, and the results had been wholly evil for nation and individual alike. The extreme theory for which he was speaking was the only way in which this war spirit could be destroyed. The wickedness of capital punishment might also be dismissed without discussion. How could the killing of the murderer recompense the murdered since it did not restore him to life? And how could hanging him amend the murderer? It was fallacious to suppose that loading the gallows with victims operated as a salutary lesson to the vicious, and the virtuous did not need such admonition. The thinking portion of the middle and working classes felt that the only difficult part of this great question was the right and propriety of taking human life in self-defence.

In this, the next step, the speaker admitted he was entering upon debatable ground. He intended to base his entire argument on two propositions: (1) That universal

brotherhood is the most perfect idea we can form of civilization; and (2) That the principles which only can create this perfect civilization must be personally and individually exemplified in the lives of its advocates. He explained that by the words "universal brotherhood" he meant a state "wherein science shall no longer unfold her energies for the few; the powers of machinery, with all their increase, no longer be wielded for the benefit of the few; the treasures of nature no longer be grasped and enjoyed by the few." He looked for a time "when no man, no woman, no child, should wander through a world abounding in habitations of comfort and say, 'I have no home;' or gaze on rich fields and say, 'Not a grain is mine, though I faint with hunger.'"

His enthusiasm was not to be dampened by the retractions of earlier idealists. "Tell us not," he cried, "of Wordsworth forgetting his youthful aspirations for liberty \* \* \* nor of poor Southey denouncing the unsophisticated breathings of his own immortal Wat Tyler to dote on the amenities of class-made law amidst the classic dust of his library at Keswick \* \* \*. Commend us [rather] to men of moral derring-do who lay hand and grasp on the vibrating heart-strings of humanity, and catch their electric power."

But mere legal enactments or international agreements, he believed, would never be capable of ending offensive warfare. Nothing would do it except the quelling of that spirit in the individual which leads to war. The terrible age-long persecution of the Jews might be attributed, he thought, to their own teaching, as set down in the Old Testament, of "a life for a life and a wound for a wound," a doctrine of retaliation and revenge for which they have had to pay bitterly. The Quakers, whose religion is based upon principles of good-will and brotherhood, have passed unhurt through numerous scenes of war and blood, and remain a monument to confound all who talk of the safety that lies in being prepared to butcher in self-defence.

If asked whether one ought not, in the case of one's wife or children being threatened with death, to save them by laying the intending murderer dead at their feet, he would reply, "If you be truly filled with the spirit of that brotherhood you wish to see established, you are to suffer that injury rather than inflict the same irremediable injury upon another as a means of preventing it." Nothing short of this would establish that brotherhood which would make the world happy and form its real civilization.

The beginning of the second lecture was taken up by detailed discussion of some of the objections to extreme non-resistance which the speaker had received after the delivery of his first lecture. He assured his hearers that the further they pushed their inquiry into this great doctrine, the more they would realize it involved the whole subject of morals, and affected every relation of man with his fellows. Replying to a query as to whether the folly and evil of non-resistance would not be shown by supposing an invasion of England to take place at a time when all of its inhabitants had resolved not to take human life, even in self-defence, he declared this to be an impossible hypothesis. "How often," he remarked, "is a mere hypothesis set up with the belief that it entirely overthrows some position which is taken by another party; and yet when this hypothesis is considered for but a moment, it is seen that it supposes an impossibility, and thus cannot overthrow anything." What obliquity, one wonders, prevented the speaker from seeing that standing by passively while one's wife and children are slaughtered is equally to suppose an impossibility? He evaded the difficulties of his position to a certain extent by declaring that in order for this, the only true theory of civilization to progress, it was necessary that the practice of its principles be commenced somewhere and by some men. He saw clearly enough, however, that the conscientious objector in time of war must expect the severest treatment for daring to say that he would not fight. Those who dissented from the maxim that it is wrong to shed human blood in self-defence he did not seek to coax

into adopting it for "the martyr-spirit must be breathed by all who give up the right to take away human life under any circumstances."

With reference to aggressive wars, he pointed out that they always commenced under some idea of self-defence, usually of some right invaded, or of some insult offered to the national honor. Yet if this "right of self-defence" were to be carried to its logical conclusion by the victims of society, how tremendous the cataclysm! To the thousands starving in London and Spitalfields would be added the millions crying from the provinces—part in the huge manufacturing towns, and the rest in the wretched villages of nobility and landed gentry. "Stockport and Manchester might raise a yell of revenge loud enough to pierce the very ears of Death." After an impressive roll-call of all the groups who were suffering unjustly in England, he concluded, "I have not enumerated—I cannot enumerate—one-thousandth part of the \* \* \* human beings in this country who are being hurried to the grave—murdered daily,—the term is strong but fearfully true—under our depraved and immoral social and political system." But, he warned, if an attempt were made to meet force with force, to resort to might and not to right as a test of excellence, the oppressors were in the stronger position, and would dungeon and transport the people's leaders, and drive the people themselves into worse oppression and deeper despair than before. In fact that was what had been happening—the working-class was suffering from the effects of their error in resorting to physical force.

But the principle of non-resistance, "although it forbids its disciples to shed blood even in self-defence, does not inculcate a resignation of body and soul to the power of tyrants. It arrests the hand of violence in every man, because it teaches that a higher power than force exists; that Truth is omnipotent and sure to prevail." What some called "non-resistance" he believed should really be called "moral resistance." And moral-resistance was to be the battle-cry of the world's regenerators, who were "not

to sit down, tongue-stricken and nerveless and sinewless, but rather "to cry out against wrong until the wrong-doer be paralyzed with the shout."

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good!" —that is the Philanthropist's golden rule of action \* \* \* "I care not who wrote this sentence, or whether I can approve of all the sentences the writer wrote by the right of that private judgment I claim, and the right of which I assert, for every man." he cried in concluding. In his final peroration he exclaimed, "There have been many glorious martyrdoms for Truth and Philanthropy and Science, and for the right to think untrammeled by despotism, and we know not but there may be such again, and many martyrdoms too. Then welcome the martyr's death, rather than wrong should grow gigantic till it dwarfs all Right \* \* \* My brother, cleave to the resolve to abide by Truth, however fatal the consequences to thy own life \* \* \*. If it be Truth it *will* prevail—it *will* change the world. \* \* \* Let us have faith in it. · We shall be instrumental in making the world a happy world, a world of brothers!"

In so brief a summary as this only the bare bones of the argument, stripped of their supporting illustrations and persuasive appeal, could be presented. It will be observed that the "Two Orations" suffer from being built upon premises which have too little connection with the vital world of fact and principles which exist almost entirely in the rarefied air of abstractions. But Cooper was ever a stiff-necked theorist, albeit a warm-hearted one.

## CHAPTER XXI

### CRITIC OF CHARTISM AND NEWSPAPER CORRESPONDENT

Cooper's efforts to obtain justice for his former fellow-prisoner were renewed at the beginning of 1846, and the motion offered by Duncombe in the House of Commons on March 10 of that year provided for the recall not only of the nationally known Frost, Williams, and Jones, but also of the comparatively obscure Ellis, in whose behalf only Cooper seems to have made any considerable effort. With other Radicals, he was able to obtain Disraeli's promise to vote in favor of Duncombe's motion, and after the division the great man met Cooper and Richard Oastler in the lobby of the House. "Macaulay made a most blood-thirsty speech," Disraeli reported; "we have polled but 31 and there were 196 against us."<sup>1</sup> The leaders of the Newport rising were released some eighteen years later, however, and allowed to return to England. Whether Ellis perished in an Australian penal colony, or returned to England at the completion of his twenty-one year sentence, I have not been able to discover.

On May 4 of this year Cooper was honored by a "public soiree," in celebration of the first anniversary of his release from Stafford Prison. The affair was held at the Chartist Hall in Turnagain Lane, London, and an account of it appeared in the first number of the little agnostic weekly, the *Reasoner* then just established by George Jacob Holyoake,<sup>2</sup> under whose editorship it continued to supply English workingmen with radical political opinion and

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Holyoake was twelve years younger than Cooper. He joined the Chartists when he was but fifteen years old, having entered the mills while still very young. Like Cooper, he educated himself in spite of many handicaps. Though piously reared, he early lost his faith in religious teaching, and soon developed into an evangelist of free-thinking. He was appointed a Socialist lecturer when he was

anti-religious propaganda for the next fifteen years. Holyoake was to have been one of the speakers at the gathering in Cooper's honor, but being called upon late he spoke only briefly, setting forth his sentiments more at length in the columns of the initial number of his little periodical. This article was preceded by a crude sonnet signed "Eugene", the nom-de-plume of George Hooper, a fellow Chartist, who a few weeks later contributed a long analysis of the *Purgatory of Suicides* to the *Reasoner*. Although Holyoake thought the Turnagain function rude and cheerless, he bore witness to the warmth and sincerity of the eulogies of Cooper by different Chartists and working men, and congratulated the poet of labor for not disdaining the class from which he had sprung.<sup>3</sup>

But if the Chartists of London were willing to honor Cooper, the head of Chartist, Feargus O'Connor, was more than ever determined to drive him out of the Chartist ranks. It is an ironical circumstance that just as Cooper's first published work, the *Wesleyan Chiefs*, made its appearance on the eve of his quarrel with the leaders of Methodism, and his withdrawal from that sect, so his most famous work, which permanently attached the identifying label "the Chartist" to his name, was brought out at a time when he was engaged in a controversy with the principal Chartist leader, and only a short time before he was expelled from the Chartist Convention at Leeds. While O'Connor was the aggressor in this last "real and fierce quarrel" with his former worshipper, it was largely because he was forced to assume the offensive, as Cooper had so far lost faith in his old leader as to be convinced that O'Connor

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twenty-three. In 1842 he was imprisoned for six months on a charge of blasphemy for having, in answer to a trick question, publicly denied the existence of a superintending providence. After leaving prison he founded the Secularist movement, which was later wrested from his control. He was also a pioneer in the co-operative movement, of which he wrote one of the first histories. His principal autobiographical writing is contained in *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, and *Bygones Worth Remembering*; both highly interesting, but marred, like much of his writing, by numerous inaccuracies. He died in 1906, having reached the age of eighty-nine. There is a two-volume biography by Joseph McCabe.

<sup>3</sup> *Reasoner*, June 3, 1846.

was merely using the Land Scheme to fill his own impoverished pockets, or at least that he was supporting the *Star* upon the Land Fund. The fact that the Chartist holding company never succeeded in getting itself registered, and that O'Connor purchased the Herringsgate estate, the first of the properties acquired, in his own name, lent color to the suspicion.

O'Connor gave full publicity to Cooper's charges in the *Northern Star*,<sup>4</sup> setting forth at the same time, in a letter addressed to the members of the Chartist Co-operative Land Society, a detailed accounting to show that the *Star* was financially sound, and that the Land Fund had been kept entirely apart from it. He concluded his statement of *Star* liabilities with an item of thirty pounds, "due to me on account of bringing out Mr. Cooper's '*Purgatory of Suicides*.'"<sup>5</sup> The falsity of this claim has already been demonstrated. O'Connor concluded his letter with the statement: "No man I ever heard of has agreed for three months with Mr. Cooper; no man ever will; no man ever can. Nature made him a poet; I made him an author."<sup>6</sup>

Cooper in reply addressed a long letter "To the London Chartists," calling attention once more to the facts about the purchase of the Herringsgate estate, and declaring that O'Connor's assumption of the office of Deputy Treasurer was illegal, no such officer being authorized in the rules of the Land Company. O'Connor's almost immediate announcement of his intention to give up the post of Deputy-Treasurer indicates that this last thrust had got home. In his letter Cooper reiterated that, as the Land Company had not enrolled under the Friendly Societies Act, it was, strictly speaking, illegal; and he also pointed out that the trustees were a mockery, as they had never entered upon office. This letter was published in the *Star* of June 20, 1846, and on the following day in *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, but O'Connor declared that

<sup>4</sup> *Northern Star*, June 13, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

henceforth Cooper would not receive another line in his organ. At the same time he asserted that Cooper's forthcoming tour for *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* was merely preliminary to his taking over the political management of that paper, and that this was his reason for wishing to destroy O'Connor and the *Star*. This assertion brought a prompt denial from Jerrold, which appeared in the *Star* of the following week.<sup>7</sup> The importance which O'Connor attached to Cooper's charge is indicated by his publication of eight columns of letters from land societies of many towns throughout England, all of them denouncing Cooper, usually in outrageous terms, and expressing their continued confidence in O'Connor.<sup>8</sup>

Cooper's reply to this onslaught of necessity appeared only in *Lloyd's Newspaper*. It was largely a re-statement of the points he had already raised in language as violent as O'Connor's own. In the postscript he even charged O'Connor with having maintained an actress mistress, the quarrel having now descended to personalities.<sup>9</sup> He also accused O'Connor of having killed the Veteran Patriot's Fund and the Exiles' Widows' and Children's Fund, two enterprises Cooper had endeavored to establish upon his release from prison. Without the backing of the *Northern Star* he had been unable to make any progress, and being now overwhelmed with abuse, he wrote to John Skelton:

Having been denounced as a wolf in sheep's clothing by the Chartists assembled in Carpenter's Hall, Manchester, who also desire that I may be discharged from the secretaryship, I hereby discharge myself.<sup>10</sup>

In still another long denunciatory letter published at the beginning of July, Cooper charged that O'Connor "had been a mere moneyless political adventurer from the outset of his career." Only one paragraph of this violent screed, which was addressed "To the Worshippers of Fear-gus O'Connor," seems worthy of quotation. "I once

<sup>7</sup> *Northern Star*, June 27, 1846.

<sup>8</sup> *Northern Star*, June 20, 1846.

<sup>9</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, June 28, 1846.

<sup>10</sup> *Gammage*, R. G., *Op. cit.*, p. 298.

thought with you," wrote the disillusioned hero-worshiper, "that O'Connor was an exception to the aristocracy from which he professed to be descended—an exception to his own class and an earnest champion of mine. I have ceased to think so; I believe I was mistaken as to his real character, hundreds now believe so: and with a view to correct the mistake under which you yet labour, I address this letter to you."<sup>11</sup> This communication, it is only fair to add, was the angry composition of a vilified and disappointed man, and does not represent Cooper's final judgment. O'Connor was actually, as the subsequent parliamentary investigation proved, a thoroughly honest official, although a criminally incompetent one in business matters. His accounts when investigated were found to be in the utmost confusion, but his own pocket was the principal sufferer from that fact. His enthusiastic nature and ready tongue made him an ideal company promoter, however, and he was able to persuade thousands into his grandiose plan for placing the proletariat upon the land, a plan in which he himself absolutely believed.

When Cooper was elected a delegate to the Leeds Convention of 1846 by certain of the London Chartists, he brought his quarrel with O'Connor to a climax by the courageous though foolhardy action of publishing in the *Leicestershire Mercury* a series of resolutions which he declared it was his intention to present at the approaching convention. Among other things these resolutions called for the separation of the Executive Committee and the Land Society; for disavowal of the doctrine of physical force and those acts of violence which had filled the public mind with an aversion to Chartism; for official endorsement of education, tolerance of the opinions of others, and morality of life, as well as specific condemnation of "the low and vulgar abuse and rash denunciating spirit of the *Northern Star*;" and for the passage of a resolution stating, "That this Convention regards Feargus O'Connor as unworthy of the confidence of Chartists, and hereby warns

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<sup>11</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, July 5, 1846.

British workingmen of the folly and danger of union with him.”<sup>12</sup> Cooper’s communication was immediately republished in the *Northern Star*, together with a denunciation of its writer as a traitor to Chartism, who “under the guise of a ‘Special Commissioner’ for collecting reports on the condition of the working classes, for publication in *Jerrold’s Weekly Newspaper* \* \* \* was prowling about the country labouring by every base means to damage Chartism.”<sup>13</sup> Loyal delegates were requested to vote for his expulsion from the convention.

Though Cooper knew of O’Connor’s demand that he be expelled if he dared to appear at the Leeds meeting, he attended nevertheless, and immediately after the presentation of their credentials by the various delegates he was on his feet to offer his advertised resolutions. He was jeered, hooted at, and reviled, but he persisted in bringing forward his proposals. Finally Ernest Jones, a newcomer to Chartism, and also a poet,<sup>14</sup> threatened to move

<sup>12</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, July 25, 1846.

<sup>13</sup> *Northern Star*, July 25, 1846. By a curious circumstance the famous names of Marx and Engels turn up in connection with this petty squabble. During the previous year O’Connor had visited Belgium, where he met the then obscure and unknown authors of the Communist Manifesto, and they continued to maintain friendly relations with the Chartist leader after his return to England. In 1846, an “Address from the German Democratic Communists of Brussels” congratulated O’Connor, among other things, “upon his victory over the calumnies of Thomas Cooper.” The signatories were Engels, Ph. Gigot, and Karl Marx—West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> Few careers have seen such surprising and extreme alterations of fortune as that of Ernest Jones [1819-1869]. He was born in Germany, the son of a Welsh major who had served at Waterloo and subsequently been appointed to the post of equerry to Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, a son of George III who finally became King of Hanover. The future Chartist was named for his father’s royal patron, who personally acted as his godfather. Jones’ early years were spent upon his father’s estate in Germany, and he was educated with the scions of the Hanoverian nobility at Luneburg. By the age of ten he had achieved his first volume of verse, and the dignity of print. He came to England with his parents in 1838, studied law, and six years later was admitted to the bar. In 1841 he married at St. George’s, Hanover Square, a young lady alleged to be a descendant of the Plantagenets; and his social career included a personal presentation to Queen Victoria. By 1845, however, he was in such financial straits, owing to unlucky speculations, that he had to hide from his creditors. His life as a man of fashion did not interfere with his writing, which was of astonishing versatility, in-

Cooper's expulsion if he persisted in the objectionable resolutions, and did, in fact, finally do so, on the grounds of contumely and malicious interference with the proceedings of the Conference.

The motion was seconded, and some held up their hands. Others remained neutral, doubtless from shame; but not a man had the courage to vote against it \* \* \*. The Chairman declared Cooper to be expelled, but he refused to go. Some of them talked about forcibly ejecting him, but this put Cooper on his mettle: he dared them, and pointing to O'Connor said:—"Why does not that great thundering coward, who has so often talked to me of physical force in

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cluding verse, a novel, three songs, and five plays, for almost none of which he was able to find a publisher. The same year in which he was gazetted bankrupt [1846] he joined the Chartists, so that he had been a member of that organization less than six months when he moved Cooper's expulsion at Leeds. During the next two years he rose to a popularity among the Chartists second only to that of O'Connor himself. Though small of stature, he possessed a ready and brilliant style of oratory, and a stentorian speaking voice. His former aristocratic connections seem to have increased his popularity with the working classes; and his real gifts, and ardent belief in the Land Plan and the Charter brought him quickly to the top. When O'Connor founded the *Labourer*, a monthly, to preach the Land Plan and supplement the *Star*, Jones became his right hand man, supporting the new scheme not only by his flair for journalism, but also by his oratory and lyrical gifts. A month after the Chartist fiasco of April 10, 1848, Jones was arrested for participation in Chartist disorders in London, and following a partisan trial was imprisoned for two years, during which he underwent severe hardships. Soon after his release he succeeded O'Connor as the active head of the Chartist forces, though these were now rapidly dwindling away. At first he avoided quarreling with O'Connor, but finally attacked him in an ostensibly fictitious political novel published in his paper *Notes for the People*, a publication which for a short time enjoyed great popularity amongst the Chartists. In this novel Jones pilloried his former chief, under the name of Simon de Brassier, as a self-seeking and insincere demagogue. The ensuing scandal caused him to deny that de Brassier was meant to represent O'Connor, but the resemblances between the two are too many to permit the acceptance of this disclaimer. Eventually Jones became as difficult to get along with as O'Connor had been, so that under his leadership the scanty remnant of Chartism was distracted by constant quarrels and schisms. He retained his connection with Chartism in one capacity or another, until as late as 1858, when he passed over to the Radicals. He celebrated his retirement by winning a libel suit against G. W. M. Reynolds, a journalist and fellow-Chartist, who had accused him of dishonesty in handling the party funds. In 1856 he started the National Suffrage Association, of which he became president. From 1861 until his death in 1869 he lived in Manchester and practiced law, and the Manchester Reference Library possesses a large collection of his personal diaries, and of manuscripts and pamphlets about him. [Vide, *Op. cit.*, pp. 302-303, and Hovell, M., *Op. cit.*, *passim*.]

private, come and put me out himself?" What, however, neither O'Connor nor any of his subordinates attempted to do by force, was effected by stratagem. Clark rose at four o'clock and proposed an adjournment until next morning, which was carried. At the appointed time Cooper presented himself, but found three stout men barring his admission. They produced a letter from the president as their authority. He tried to push past them, but in vain.<sup>15</sup>

This high-handed exclusion of a regularly elected and duly accredited delegate, with no attempt to answer the charges which he had published against the Land Company and the capacity and honesty of its officials, Slosson believes, "discredited the faction loyal to O'Connor more than Cooper's resolutions could have done even if the convention had accepted them."<sup>16</sup>

In spite of this unpleasant experience, Cooper did not resign from the Chartist Association; in fact his name was mentioned on the occasion of the election of a new National Executive in 1850, four years later, but he refused to be a candidate.

To return to the newspaper work referred to in the preceding paragraphs: it was in the spring of 1846 that Douglas Jerrold informed Cooper of his intention to commence a weekly newspaper. Jerrold seems to have contracted the journalistic fever during his brief connection with the ill-starred *Daily News*, which with Charles Dickens as editor had begun publication on January 21, 1846, with the intention of carrying out Dickens's "enlightened and enthusiastic views \* \* \* as to the crying need of popular education, and for generally raising the status of the poor."<sup>17</sup> The *News* editorship proved such a heavy burden that Dickens resigned after seventeen numbers. John Forster stepped into the breach, and commissioned Jerrold to supply the *News* with editorials, but according to W. J. Fox he "proved so utterly inefficient in his attempts at leaders that his engagement had to be terminated."<sup>18</sup> That

<sup>\*</sup> Gammage, R. G., *Op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Slosson, Preston, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Garnett, Richard, *Life of W. J. Fox*, p. 279.

<sup>\*\*</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

this experience did not affect Jerrold's self-confidence is evident from his announcement a few months later of his intention to establish a newspaper of his own, so as to have a free opportunity of expressing himself on social and political topics of the day.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly there appeared on July 18, 1846, the first copy of *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, a well-planned journal of twenty-four pages, enlarged to thirty-two six months later, the utmost limit allowed by the Stamp Law.<sup>20</sup> Jerrold at once commissioned Cooper to travel through the industrial towns of the Midlands and Northern England, for the purpose of preparing a series of weekly articles written on the spot describing the actual condition of the working class. The *London Times* a short time previously had published a series of articles by Rauold Martin based on the Reports of the Healths of Towns Commission.<sup>21</sup> Cooper was sent out as an unofficial Radical commissioner to supply similar reports from a different viewpoint.

His articles, which began in the second number of the new publication [July 25, 1846], appeared under the general heading of "The Condition of the Working People of England." According to the introductory announcement they were designed to answer such questions as:

What is the *real* life of the masses?—how are the people fed, clothed, housed?—what is the nature and kind of their labour?—what influence has this labour upon their health and term of life?—how are they progressing in education, or are they without it altogether?—what are their thoughts upon the great subjects of morals, religion, and government, and the differences of outward condition among men?—or have they no thoughts, no care at all concerning such questions?—what, in a word, is the real social state of our people, not of the privileged few, but of the many?<sup>22</sup>

Cooper's sixteen articles covered to some degree all the questions here raised, and give a valuable first-hand

<sup>19</sup> Jerrold, W., *Douglas Jerrold, Dramatist and Wit*, ii: 425.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 434.

<sup>21</sup> *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, August 1, 1846.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1846. Professor Emery Neff reminds me that Carlyle had suggested that such an inquiry be made, in his little book *Chartism*, [1839].

account of industrial conditions in nine different parts of England. They are too diffuse, uncritical, and lacking in scientific temper, however, to be of first importance. They begin, appropriately enough, with four articles on Leicestershire. Queen Elizabeth refused to grant William Lea, who invented the stocking-frame, a monopoly for his invention. "My lord," Cooper represents her as saying to the patron of Shakespeare's company, Lord Hunsdon, "I have too much love for my poor people who obtain their bread by the employment of knitting to give money to forward an invention which will tend to their ruin by depriving them of employment, and thus making them beggars."<sup>23</sup> As early as 1777 the knitters presented a petition to Parliament stating that notwithstanding their utmost industry they were incapable of earning the common necessaries of life, not only on account of the lowness of their wages, but because of the frame rent, and charges for keeping the frames in order \* \* \*. Because of the denial of this petition there were riots in 1779 which terminated in the burning of homes and the destruction of the frames. As a result of these excesses Parliament in 1811 made frame-breaking a hanging matter. Byron delivered his maiden speech in the House of Lords in opposition to this measure.<sup>24</sup> The bad conditions which in 1843 led Cooper to frenzied indictment of the society which tolerated them, resulted in 1844 in a Parliamentary investigation of the knitting industry throughout Great Britain, and in his articles Cooper quotes freely from the resulting Blue Books.

The following paragraph from Cooper's second article, though written nearly ninety years ago, has a strangely familiar sound today:

Whose fault it is that this state of things [over-production followed by unemployment] has been experienced for the last seventy years, or whether it be no fault of any party, but the natural result of causes beyond control, is, in a great degree, still a question \* \* \*. I asked an intelligent manufacturer if he thought the frame-work population could be fully employed for half the year regularly with the present amount of available machinery. His answer was re-

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, July 25, 1846.

markable. "Sir, if every man, woman, and boy who has been trained up to the trade were to be put on full work, they could make as many goods in four months as we could sell in twelve."<sup>26</sup>

After the completion of the articles on Leicestershire Cooper proceeded to visit and to describe conditions in Sheffield, Lincolnshire, Hull, Sunderland, Carlisle, Preston, Manchester, and Bradford.<sup>26</sup> But as this study is not concerned primarily with social conditions in nineteenth century England, I must resist the temptation to quote further. Interesting though these articles may be to the student of industrial conditions of the time, they are by their very nature journalism, and not literature. Upon their conclusion, and Cooper's return to London, he was informed that the *Weekly Newspaper* was not proving a financial success, and that a reduction in staff was necessary.<sup>27</sup> Publisher and contributor parted on the best of terms, however; in fact Jerrold a few years later, when he assumed the editorship of *Lloyd's Weekly*, employed Cooper again.

It is questionable whether Jerrold could easily have found another commission acceptable to Cooper, who was not interested in remaining a journalist,<sup>28</sup> but who was moved by a burning passion to improve the political condition and educational opportunities of his own order. For

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1, 1846.

<sup>27</sup> The sixteen articles, which are signed with the nom-de-plume "Eye-witness," will be found in vol. I of *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* as follows: Leicestershire, pp. 28, 52, and 102; Sheffield, p. 151; Lincolnshire, p. 197; Hull, p. 220; Sunderland, and the Coal Trade, pp. 246, 269, 293, and 316; Carlisle, p. 368; Preston, p. 416; Manchester, pp. 443, 470; Bradford p. 559.

<sup>28</sup> See Jerrold, W. B., *Life of Douglas Jerrold*, 2d edn., London, n. d., pp. 221-223 for an account of the decline of the *Weekly*, and its demise in 1848, leaving its editor saddled with a heavy debt, which was not paid until after his death, when it was discharged by his life policy. After Jerrold's withdrawal it became the *Weekly News*, subsequently merged with the *Weekly Chronicle*.

"On this point George Julian Harney wrote: "With his [Cooper's] natural talents and acquired knowledge it cannot be doubted that had he merely sought to live by his pen, his first difficulties in journalism surmounted, he would have rapidly achieved a good-paying position in connection with the press. But Thomas Cooper was a born crusader, and valued journalism only as a means—one of the means—to enlighten the ignorant, impart hope to the despairing, and to stimulate the unrepresented toilers to struggle for emancipation."—*Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892.

this purpose he made use of newspaper work, Chartism, poetry, lecturing, and eventually, of the pulpit. One reason why he never produced any great literary work was that in mature life he wrote almost nothing purely from the urge to express his thoughts and feelings; always his writings had instruction, warning, and exhortation as at least a subsidiary aim, and such a completely didactic purpose was almost necessarily fatal to artistic perfection and enduring worth. Then, too, his industry, wide reading, self-confidence, burning ambition, and real talent were never to make up for his lack of formal training, cultured environment, and leisure in which to create and revise. Though a vigorous, clear, and copious writer, Cooper in most of his work lacks originality and grace, deficiencies due in some measure to his having to produce most of his work in haste.

Through his work for *Jerrold's* paper Cooper obtained an opportunity to call upon the aged Poet Laureate Wordsworth at his home in Rydal Mount. He did not write out an account of his visit until four years later, when the death of Wordsworth [April 13, 1850] led him to compose a "Reminiscence" for the May 11 and 25 issues of *Cooper's Journal*.<sup>29</sup> After the completion of his report on Carlisle in September, Cooper set out from that town, "taking along merely the stick in his hand and a map of the district in his pocket." On the second day of his outing he climbed Skidaw, and in the afternoon of the third day reached Rydal Lake, having left Keswick that morning. His account of the meeting with Wordsworth is as follows:

There was a magnet in the very name of Rydal Mount: how was I to get past it, without attempting to see and talk with Wordsworth? I asked, at a house by the high-way side, where he lived; and was immediately pointed to his cottage, lying upwards and to the left, a little out of the direct road to Ambleside. I began to walk in that direction; but I was somewhat puzzled as to whether my purpose was not too romantic to be carried out.

<sup>29</sup> Included in the autobiography, in slightly revised form, as chapter xxvi. I reproduce the paragraphing and punctuation of the 1850 articles.

*I had no introduction:* a fact which would have settled the question at once had I been in London, and the wild thought had entered my head of attempting to make a call so unceremoniously, on any of the great men of letters living there. But Rydal Mount, thought I, does not come, can not come, under the same category as London; it is an out-of-the-way place; and many must have come on pilgrimages to it, who had no introduction. Yes—I reasoned again, —in their carriages they might come, and would then seem to assert their right to be attended to: but what will be said to me—covered with dust, and having nothing to recommend me—except—but I scarcely dared to hope it, the patriarchal Poet Laureate should have heard that a Prison Rhyme was sent forth last year by a Chartist—and yet, what sort of a recommendation would *that* be to Wordsworth? That was my forlorn hope, however, and determined not to fail for want of trying, I boldly strode up to the door, and knocked.

Behold, a servant maid came up to the door, and when I had asked "Is Mr. Wordsworth in?" and she had answered "yes"—I was, for one moment, completely at a loss—for she looked at me from head to foot with an expression which told me she was surprised that I should come there covered with dust, and so plainly dressed. To send in a request, verbally, I felt at once, would not do. "Stop a moment!" I said—took off my hat, drew a slip of paper from my pocket, and resting it on my hat-crown, I wrote instantly—"Thomas Cooper, author of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, desires to pay his devout regards to Mr. Wordsworth." I requested the maid to present it; and in half-a-minute she returned, and said, with an altered expression of face, "Come in, sir, if you please." In another half minute I was in the presence of that majestic old man, and I was bowing with a deep and heart-felt homage for his intellectual grandeur—with which his striking form and the pile of his forehead served to congrue so fully—when he seized my hand, and welcomed me with a smile so paternal, and such a hearty 'How do you do? I am very happy to see you'—that the tears stood in my eyes for joy.

How our conversation opened I cannot remember; and yet I think every word he uttered I can recollect—though not the order in which the remarks came from him. This I attribute partly to our conversation being broken by the visit of a very intelligent and amiable lady—[the widow of a great and good man—the late Dr. Arnold, of Rugby]—accompanied by her little daughter, and also by my being invited to take some refreshment in the adjoining room, and at the kind solicitation of Mrs. Wordsworth,—whose conversation was of too great excellence for me to forget it. It related chiefly to Southey, whose bust was in the room; and for whose

genius and industry—in spite of the Toryism of his manhood—I had a deep admiration, to say nothing of the noble strains for freedom written in his youth.

What the great author of “The Excursion” said respecting my Prison Rhyme, I shall not relate here, but remembering what he said I can also bear the remembrance that *Quarterly*, *Edinburgh*, *Westminster*, and *Times*, have hitherto, and, alike, judged it fit to be silent as to there being such a poem in existence. Nothing struck me so much in Wordsworth’s conversation as his remark concerning Chartist—after the subject of my imprisonment had been touched upon. “You were right,” he said; “I always said the people were right in what they asked; but you went the wrong way to get it.” I almost doubted my ears—being in the presence of the ‘Tory’ Wordsworth. He read the enquiring expression of my look, in a moment,—and immediately repeated what he had said; “You were quite right: there is nothing unreasonable in your Charter: it is the foolish attempts at physical force for which you have been blamable.”

I had heard that Wordsworth was very vain and egotistical, but had always thought this very unlikely to be true, in one whose poetry is so profoundly reflective; and I now felt astonished that these reports should ever have been circulated. To me he was all kindness and goodness, while the dignity with which he uttered every sentence seemed natural in a man whose grand head and face, if one had never known of his poetry, would have proclaimed his intellectual superiority. There was but one occasion on which I discerned the feeling of jealousy in him: it was when I mentioned Byron. “If there were time,” he said, “I could show you that Lord Byron was not so great a poet as you think him to be—but never mind that now.” I had just been classing his own sonnets and Childe Harold together as the noblest poetry since *Paradise Lost*; but I did not reassert what I had said: I should have felt that to be irreverent towards the noble old man, however unchanged my judgment remained.\*

“I am pleased to find,” he said, while we were talking about Byron, “that you preserve your muse chaste, and free from rank and corrupt passion. Lord Byron degraded poetry in that respect. Men’s hearts are bad enough. Poetry should refine and purify their natures; not make them worse.”

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\* End of installment printed in *Cooper’s Journal*, May 11, 1850.

I ventured the plea that *Don Juan* was descriptive, and that Shakespere had also described bad passions in anatomizing the human heart, which was one of the great vocations of the Poet.

"But there is always a moral lesson," he replied, quickly, "in Shakespere's pictures. You feel that he is not stirring men's passions for the sake of awakening the brute within them: the pure and virtuous is always presented in high contrast—but the other riots in corrupt pictures, evidently with enjoyment of the corruption."

I diverted him from a theme which it was clear created unpleasant thoughts in him; and asked his opinion of the poetry of the day.

"There is little that can be called high poetry," he said; "Mr. Tennyson affords the richest promise. He will do great things yet; and ought to have done greater things by this time."

"His sense of music," I observed, "seems more perfect than that of any of the new race of poets."

"Yes," he replied, "the perception of harmony lies in the very essence of the Poet's nature; and Mr. Tennyson gives magnificent proofs that he is endowed with it."

I instanced Tennyson's rich association of musical words in his 'Morte d'Arthur,' 'Godiva,' and 'Ulysses,' and other pieces—as proofs of his possessing as fine a sense of music in syllables as Keats, and even Milton; and the patriarchal poet, with an approving smile assented to it.

I assured him how much I had been interested with Mrs. Wordsworth's conversation respecting Southey, and told him that James Montgomery of Sheffield, in an interview I had with him many years before, had spoken very highly of Southey.

"Well, that is pleasing to hear," he observed, "for Mr. Montgomery's political opinions have never resembled Southey's."

"That was Mr. Montgomery's own observation," I rejoined. "while he was assuring me that he lived near Mr. Southey for a considerable time, at one period of his life, and he never knew a more estimable man. He affirmed, too, that when people attributed Mr. Southey's change of political opinions to corrupt motives they greatly wronged him."

"And depend upon it they did," Wordsworth answered, with great dignity: "it was the foulest libel to attribute bad motives to Mr. Southey. No man's change was ever more sincere. He would have hated himself had he been a hypocrite; and could never afterwards have produced anything noble."

He repeated Mrs. Wordsworth's remarks on Southey's purity of morals, and immense industry in reading almost always with the pen in his hand; and his zeal in laying up materials for future works. With a sigh he recurred to his friend's mental decline and imbecility in his latter days and again I led him to other topics.

"There will be great changes on the Continent," he said, "when the present King of France dies. But *not* while he lives. The different governments will have to give constitutions to their people, for knowledge is spreading, and constitutional liberty is sure to follow."

I thought him perfectly right about Louis Philippe—and which of us would not have thought him right in 1846? But yet I had mistaken his estimate of the 'King of the Barricades.'

"Ay, he is too crafty and powerful," said I, "to be easily overthrown: there will be extension of French liberty in his days."

"Oh, but you are mistaken in the character of Louis Philippe," he observed very pointedly; "you should not call him crafty: he is a very wise and politic prince. The French needed such a man. He will consolidate French character and render it fit for the *peaceable* acquirement of rational liberty, at his decease."

I remembered the venerable age and high mental rank of him with whom I was conversing, and simply said, "Do you think so, sir?"—without telling him that I thought he scarcely comprehended his subject. But how the events of 1848 must have made him wonder!

He had the same view of the spread of freedom in England, in proportion to the increase in knowledge; and descanted with animation on the growth of Mechanics' Institutes and similar institutions. "The people are *sure* to have the franchise," he said, with an emphasis, "as knowledge increases; but you will not get all you seek, at once—and you must never seek it again by physical force," he added, turning to me with a smile: "it will only make you longer about it."

A great part of the time he was thus kindly and paternally impressing his thoughts upon me, we were walking on the terrace outside his house,—whither he had conducted me to note the beautiful view it commanded. It was indeed a glorious spot for a Poet's home. Rydal Lake was in view from one window in the cottage, and Windemere from another—with all the grand assemblage of mountain and rock that intervened. From the terrace the view of Windemere was magnificent. The Poet's aged and infirm sister was being drawn about the court-yard in a wheeled-chair, as we

walked on the terrace. He descended with me, and introduced me to her—as a poet!—and hung over her infirmity with the kindest affection, while she talked to me.

When I hastened to depart—fearing that I had already wearied him—he walked with me to the gate, pressing my hand repeatedly, smiling upon me so benevolently, and uttering so many good wishes for my happiness and usefulness—that I felt almost unable to thank him. I left him with a more intense feeling of having been in the presence of a good and great intelligence, than I had ever felt in any other moments of my life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> End of installment of May 25, 1850. See *Cooper's Journal, or Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom, and Progress*: vol I, pp. 291-292 and 324-325. Cf. *Life*, pp. 287-295.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LONDON LECTURER

Literature having proved so unremunerative, it became necessary for the impecunious author to find something to do which would prove more lucrative. Accordingly he dropped the pen and ascended the rostrum, finding in his powers of eloquence a means of continuing the fight for freedom, and of earning a living at the same time. From 1846 to 1855 he was engaged almost continuously in lecturing on literary, historical, political, and theological subjects in the various Socialist, Chartist, and Secularist halls of London. By reason of his fluency, zeal to instruct, and remarkable popularity, he was particularly fitted for such work, and he became a power upon the platform. At the time of his death an American religious periodical described him as having been, before his conversion, more formidable than Robert Ingersoll as a lecturer on free thought subjects.<sup>1</sup>

It was not difficult in the 1840's for a popular lecturer to find engagements. The number of halls, institutes, atheneums, and assembly rooms which offered weekly lectures to the general public at this time was surprisingly large.<sup>2</sup> Many were supported by the English Socialists, education of the workers being an integral part of Owen's program for the regeneration of society. Such Socialist meeting places were usually called Halls of Science, or Social Institutions, as they aimed at being centers "for the cultivation of *social* science, a thing then dreaded by the wealthy, and frowned upon by the religious."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Advocate* [N. Y.], July 21, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> A list of more than forty libraries, workingmen's societies, and institutes located in the principal cities of England was printed in the *Reasoner*, August 12, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, 2 vols., London, 1908, 1: 48.

principal lecturing centers of the Socialists in London at this date were the John Street Institution [Branch A1], and the Marylebone, Finsbury, Whitechapel, and Blackfriars Road institutions. Cooper spoke at all of them on many different occasions.

His first engagement, as we have seen, was at the National Hall, where he eventually succeeded W. J. Fox as Sunday evening lecturer. For these addresses he must have received three or four guineas a night, as the usual fee for such lecturing varied from the sum last named down to two guineas,<sup>4</sup> depending upon the size of the hall and the popularity of the speaker. During the winter Cooper must have earned several guineas a week by his lecturing, though he was nobly generous in donating his services for worthy causes.

There exist many testimonials to Cooper's unusual oratorical gifts. One who had heard him in England described him for Americans in 1854 as follows:

He is a man of small stature, not exceeding 5' 5" in height, with a common-place looking countenance, which you would pass in the street as that of a very ordinary person; but how different when his mind is excited! You can perceive at once that his fiery soul is held by no bounds—a gleam of intuitive genius spreads around his \* \* \* head, and he takes you where he pleases—you cannot help it—you are as irresistibly compelled to follow him as though you had got into the Niagara stream.<sup>5</sup>

From the reports of his lectures which appeared in the *Reasoner*, it is evident that Cooper shared the general conviction of his time that the working and middle classes could be educated by means of informational lectures. Emerson, himself a famous lecturer, waxed enthusiastic upon this subject in a letter to Carlyle:

I am always haunted with brave dreams of what might be accomplished in the lecture room—so free and unpretentious a platform—Delos not yet made fast. I imagine an eloquence of

<sup>4</sup> *Vide Reasoner*, March 5, 1851, "On Lecturing: Its Conditions and Character."

<sup>5</sup> *Philadelphia Bizarre*, vol. V, No. 26 [October 1854].

infinite variety—rich as conversation can be with anecdote, joke, tragedy, epic and pindarics, arguments and confessions.<sup>6</sup>

Cooper certainly met Emerson's specification of "eloquence of infinite variety," for between December 13, 1846, and June 27, 1847, he lectured at the National Hall on the following topics:

Taxation and the National Debt  
The Peculiarities of Men of Genius  
Oberlin, Neff, and Bernard Gilpin  
Mohamed and Mohamedanism  
The Age of Chivalry  
The Superstitions of the Middle Ages  
Life and Writings of Thomas Paine  
Poland: Sobieski: Kosciusko  
William Tell and the Deliverance of Switzerland  
Rienzi the Tribune  
Washington and the American Revolution  
The French Revolution to the Execution of Louis XVI  
The French Revolution to the Fall of the Directory  
Life and Character of Napoleon  
Wrongs of Ireland  
The Genius of Shakespere: Hamlet  
Reign of Anne  
Conquests of Alexander  
Lord Byron  
Mystics and Visionaries  
Ancient Alexandria  
Life and Character of Shelley  
English Character

But the special topic mattered little to the audiences which crowded to hear these lectures; for no matter from what point he started sooner or later the speaker invariably touched upon the wrongs of his hearers. As the Hammonds have pointed out in their recent study of Chartism:

The men and women who \* \* \* listened to \* \* \* Vincent or Cooper \* \* \* were swept along by the rhetoric which described their place in society, degraded and insulted. \* \* \* Their indignation was fired by the condition of society as it was; their imagina-

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<sup>6</sup> *Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson*, 1: 345.

tion was touched by a picture of society as it might be. The Chartist rhetoric, that is, moved and excited all those social instincts that were disregarded or flouted in the arrangement of their lives. That is why the special topic mattered little.<sup>7</sup>

Cooper's new program of education as the cure for the ills of society also helps to explain the heterogeneity of his lecture subjects. Expelled from Chartist favor, he no longer confined himself to a scheme of political reform, but allowed his literary and moral tendencies to have free rein. This was merely a shift of emphasis, however, for even in the old Leicester days the Shakesperean Brigade had carried on adult education. The conviction of so many Victorians that education was the one thing most needful was due in large measure to the abysmal state of ignorance then existing among the "lower orders." It was not until four years after Cooper's National Hall lectures that W. J. Fox introduced the first bill ever presented in Parliament for the promotion of secular education of all the people; and as there was determined opposition to any such measure by both the clergy and the aristocracy, it was many years after 1850 before a national system of education was actually established. Under such circumstances it was only natural that those who were endeavoring to improve social conditions should look upon education as the supreme instrument for advancing this purpose, and tend to overrate its influence and possibilities.

That Cooper's lectures did stimulate mental cultivation among members of his own order<sup>8</sup> can hardly be doubted, however, in view of their great popularity, both when delivered, and when published in condensed form in

<sup>7</sup> Hammond, J. L. and Barbara, *The Age of the Chartists, 1825-1854; a Study of Discontent*, London, 1930, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Professor Peers confirms this opinion. "There can be no doubt," he writes, "that Cooper's extensive lecture tours in the North of England and in the Midlands in the 'fifties and early' sixties did something to prepare the way for the University Extension movement in the 'seventies'." "Thomas Cooper the Leicester Chartist"—*loc. cit.*

the *Reasoner*<sup>9</sup> Cooper's field of operations was much wider than that of Fox had been, and he carried this type of work to a higher degree of development than did Henry Vincent, who is credited with having originated popular lecturing to the working classes.<sup>10</sup> He had a card of admittance to the British Museum Library, and it was from this great storehouse of knowledge that he obtained the raw materials for his lectures. After mastering the facts of his subject, and writing out the introduction and conclusion, Cooper spoke extemporaneously from a few brief notes, often with none at all. While his lectures contain only such information as may be found in any standard treatise on the subject, they are enriched by anecdote, illustration and original reflection, the fruit of years of thinking and reading. Cooper passed the information he gained from books through the alembic of his own mind, and by the resulting addition of interpretation and comment produced a type of address exactly fitted to the understanding and feelings of his hearers.<sup>11</sup> His sincerity, enthusiasm, and facility enabled him to hold audiences charmed and interested during addresses of a length which modern audiences would regard as intolerable. The fol-

<sup>9</sup> These reports began in the *Reasoner* of March 10, 1847. Limitations of space and the rapidity of Cooper's enunciation made it impossible to reproduce the whole oration. The lectures on Rienzi the Tribune, Life and Political Writings of Thomas Paine, Mohamed and Mohamedanism, the Age of Chivalry, Superstitions of the Middle Ages, and the Genius of Shakespeare-Hamlet were reproduced in condensed form in the *Reasoner* during March, April and May, 1847.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, J. H. *Op. cit.*, p. 70. This writer also stated: "Cooper after composing in prison his remarkable *Purgatory of Suicides*, dedicated his great abilities solely to popular education, sharing with Henry Vincent the honors of the platform. As the two men lived mainly on the funds supplied by middle-class audiences, they were speedily scouted as renegades by the Chartist irreconcilables, and ceased to take any very active part in the movement." *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> Referring to Cooper's lecture on "The Legends of Greece," with its, to such an audience, many uncouth names, Holyoake wrote in the *Reasoner*: "Such themes, it is generally held, are impossible for a popular assembly; but Mr. Cooper proves that any theme which may be made capable of conveying instruction is practicable to an earnest-minded and devoted man of genius."

lowing is a good example of his old-fashioned rhythmic and sonorous periods and striking rhetorical tropes:

As it is with individuals, so it is with nations: they have their shorter or longer career of glory, and then their living light is no more; their effulgence dies out, and barbarism sets itself where civilization once flourished and promised to endure forever. \* \* \* Babylon and Ninevah, with their populous millions, deprived of their princes, their treasures of gold and silver, their temples that towered to the skies; their hanging gardens—superb terraces of horticulture raised in the air—\* \* \* have passed into the dust and save a solitary mound here and there, and some fragments of sculpture recently dug up, they have no visible record. \* \* \* And Athens, glorious Athens, what is she? The Parthenon in ruined majesty still looks from its monumental hill to the harbour of Piræus, where the little fleet anchored in which Themistocles embarked to encounter and conquer the proud power of the Persian; but the harbour is no longer the busy haunt of commerce; and where the statesmanship of Pericles elevated a people, and the peerless oratory of Demosthenes charmed them, and the matchless poetry of Eschylus and Sophocles refined them, and the chisel of Phidias well-nigh gave breath to marble—\* \* \* where valour breathed, and eloquence burned and patriotism was enthroned, indolence and irresolution and sterility now reign: the owl screams at night amid the ruined columns of Minerva; the glory is departed.<sup>11a</sup>

In his lecture on the "Genius of Shakespere" Cooper quoted copiously from Hamlet, a play which in his youthful days he had learned by heart. His comments on this drama and Othello are puerile, but he was not to be outdone in idolatry of Shakespere. "Ordinary minds," he observed, "may consistently dispute upon the merits or defects of ordinary writers; but when \* \* \* we dare to gaze upon the awful and god-like countenance of Shakespere \* \* \* it becomes us to express ourselves with a modesty befitting our conscious inferiority."<sup>12</sup> Yet like many another commentator, he was quite capable of reading into the great dramatist an interpretation true only of him who made it. "Shakespere," he asserts solemnly, "could not joke for the sake of joking: he could not stoop to it: mere fun-making was beneath him: he ever seeks to in-

<sup>11a</sup> From "Rienzi the Tribune," *Reasoner*, March 17, 1847.

<sup>12</sup> "Genius of Shakespere: Hamlet," *Reasoner*, May 12, 1847.

struct." <sup>13</sup> As a picture of Cooper the statement is exactly true; as applied to Shakespere it would be hard to surpass for falsity.

Holyoake has left an amusing reminiscence of an experience while taking notes for one of the *Reasoner's* accounts of Cooper's lectures:

Though robust-looking [he says of Cooper] he must have had a nervous nature—he was so supernaturally impatient. \* \* \* Sometimes [when I was] writing a notice of his lecture for the *Reasoner* \* \* \* he would stop and announce to the audience that he could not go on, because I was writing, he was sure, some criticism of his lecturing. Then I would explain to the assembly that if Mr. Cooper would say excellent things which I wished to preserve while they were fresh in my mind, it was his own fault if I made notes of them. This would satisfy him, and the lecture proceeded.<sup>14</sup>

Another writer, at the time of Cooper's death, told of having seen him while reciting Satan's speech from *Paradise Lost*, "leap, in his enthusiasm, on the reading desk before him." <sup>15</sup>

On two different occasions W. J. Fox had Cooper act as his substitute for a brief period in the pulpit of the South Place Chapel. The first time that Cooper addressed this notable Unitarian congregation was at the beginning of 1847,<sup>16</sup> during Fox's illness—a prostration not wholly unconnected, perhaps, with the death in December of Eliza Flower. The second engagement to speak was due to Fox's having to be absent from London in connection with his first candidacy as M.P. for Oldham,<sup>17</sup> and covered the four Sundays of July and the first in August, in 1847. The *Utilitarian Record* states that after his address on the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*, March, 1904.

<sup>15</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892.

<sup>16</sup> *Life*, p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> "The *Reasoner's* account [iii:534-8] of the "Celebration of the Election of W. J. Fox," states that: "Thomas Cooper, who spoke last and briefly, wisely moderated to soberness the exaggerated expectations in which the previous speakers had indulged respecting Mr. Fox's appearance in Parliament."

morning of the last-mentioned date he was too ill to meet an engagement to speak that afternoon at the John Street Institution.<sup>18</sup>

As Fox stood in the religious field next to James Martineau as the leading English Unitarian of the time, it was a compliment to be chosen to substitute for him, even temporarily. Nor was the opportunity lost because of false modesty. Cooper accepted Fox's invitation "without hesitation." "It was not," he explained, "that I thought I was my peerless friend's equal in eloquence that I ventured to stand in his place, for he had no equal in England. But I thought I could say something worth hearing even by Cockneys; and I had not learned to pretend that I *feared* to supply the place of another speaker, whoever he might be."<sup>19</sup> The intervals during which he served were so brief, however, that Fox's biographer does not mention them.

The South Place Chapel was one of the few Victorian pulpits in which a professed admirer of Thomas Paine would have been allowed to appear. For Cooper at this time was a militant champion of Paine and his writings. At about the time of his first substituting for Fox, namely on January 29, 1847, he acted as chairman of a meeting at the John Street Institution to celebrate the anniversary of Paine's birth. On this occasion Cooper proposed four "sentiments" which were "spoken to" amongst others by Hetherington, Watson, and Bronterre O'Brien. Two of these "sentiments" were:

The Memory of Thomas Paine—may his works, imperishable as the language in which they are written, become universally studied and reduced to practice.

<sup>18</sup> *Utilitarian Record*, August 4, 1847. The account stated that Cooper was "suffering from inflammation of the lungs, and \* \* \* another effort might endanger his life." William Howitt, too, in 1848, referred to Cooper's "constant struggles with ill health, the fruit of jail confinement. The difficulty with which he pursues his lecturing from this cause would, however, never be suspected by those who listen to the fervent addresses which, often for two hours together, he pours forth." *Howitt's Journal* iii:246.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 297.

The Speedy Downfall of the Iniquities of Kingcraft and Priestcraft—may the people open their eyes to the delusions practiced upon them, and learn to cooperate to establish prosperity and happiness all over the world.

On January 31, 1847, Cooper delivered a lecture at the National Hall on "The Life and Political Writings of Thomas Paine," which was reproduced in part in the *Reasoner* of March 24, 1847. One paragraph of this oration reads:

Milton escaped a bloody death, but it took one hundred years to free his memory from reproach. Shelley and Paine have been but a few years with the dead as yet, and we must endure to behold their names loaded with the venom of calumny, assured that the time will come when they will be classed with the honoured departed, and receive the universal love and reverence which is their due. But that time is not yet; and he who undertakes the humble task of justifying the memory of the fearless enemy of kings and priests must be content to share his reproach. \* \* \* My brief task tonight I regard as a solemn duty, and if it were the last hour I had to live I would cheerfully and earnestly discharge it by defending the memory of the noble stay-maker. \* \* \* Yet be it remembered that while claiming the need of truth for the majority of Paine's doctrines [I do not say for all: that cannot be said of any man that ever lived—no, not even the Man of Nazareth. \* \* \*] I do not demand that any other man should take them for truth before a candid and free examination.

A fortnight after this lecture a zealous Christian female distributed at the door of the John Street Institution a pious but sadly incoherent leaflet commencing, "Trust not to Thomas Paine, Thomas Cooper, or any other Thomas save he called Didymus."<sup>20</sup>

The second anniversary of Cooper's release from prison was again celebrated by a "festival" in his honor. The chair was to have been occupied by W. J. Fox, but illness prevented his appearance, and William Howitt consented to act as chairman in his place. In his opening remarks Howitt referred to the *Purgatory of Suicides* in the following enthusiastic terms:

Mr. Cooper knows that when I first read his poem—his great poem—which I may call an epoch in literature, that I then con-

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<sup>20</sup> *Reasoner*, March 1, 1847.

gratulated him, not upon being liberated, but upon having been put in jail—and not only put in, but kept there. If it had not been for his confinement, and the leisure thus afforded him, he might not have been able to extract his mind from the every-day toil which he encountered, and never have given the world that poem.<sup>21</sup>

Hewitt concluded his remarks with some reflections upon the imperfect existing state of education, at the end of which he inquired: Why should there not be in the city of London a People's College, as well as a King's College? Such a college had already been commenced at Sheffield, and he could not see why there should not be one in London. He should like to see one, and to see Thomas Cooper placed at its head. He had been his own schoolmaster and professor, and no one was better fitted to stand at the head of such a college.<sup>22</sup> At the conclusion of further remarks by William Lovett, W. H. Ashurst, Dr. Epps, Richard Moore, and W. J. Linton, Cooper responded briefly, and the occasion came to an end.

The National Hall lecturing was intermittent for the summer, ending temporarily on June 27, 1847, after Cooper had spoken there on consecutive Sundays for about nine months. Three weeks later he began at the John Street Institution a series of four free-thinking addresses which he had first proposed delivering nearly a year before.<sup>23</sup> These were the first wholly sceptical lectures which Cooper had attempted. "My unbelief," he observed in his autobiography, "never made me happy, and I felt no peculiar pleasure in spreading it. With the one exception of Newcastle-on-Tyne there was not a place outside of London where I openly broached sceptical opinions. My subjects were the Poets, History, Politics, and Morals."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Reasoner*, May 19, 1847.

<sup>22</sup> *Reasoner*, May 19, 1847. Seven years later, in 1854, the well-known Workingmen's College was established, with Frederick Denison Maurice as its first Principal.

<sup>23</sup> Before setting out on his tour for Jerrold, Cooper had announced a series of four addresses on the "Necessity of Confidence in Human Reason as a Guide to Truth and Guarantee for Progress." When he accepted the newspaper assignment these lectures were necessarily cancelled.

<sup>24</sup> *Life*, p. 357.

Dr. Fosdick has ventured the generalization that "Very little atheism springs merely or mainly from sceptical philosophy, but for the most part is emotionally caused."<sup>25</sup> Cooper's scepticism was of this variety. Religious doubt first entered his mind as a result of the terrible misery of the Leicester stockingers, and these doubts were deepened and intensified by his imprisonment concerning which he wrote:

I believe these two months of torture at the beginning of my two years' imprisonment served most fearfully to bring my atheistic reasonings to a head. I was conscious of incorruptible disinterestedness in my advocacy of the rights of the poor. I regarded my imprisonment with its harsh treatment as a grievous wrong. My tender wife was enduring sufferings that brought her near death. And the poor were suffering still! I had not lessened their evils an atom by my struggles. It was a world of wrong I now reasoned; and there could not be in it the Almighty and beneficent Providence in which I had all my life devoutly believed.<sup>26</sup>

It was the "morbid condition of feeling and thought that grew to be natural in prison," he tells us, that gave rise to "trains of reasoning about moral evil, and the pain I supposed to be so prevalent in creation, such as the reader will continually find in my Prison Rhyme."<sup>27</sup>

After his release he had struggled against these doubts, and believed he might have broken away from them sooner had it not been for his coming upon George Elliott's translation of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*. "I became," he says in the autobiography, "fast bound in the net of Strauss, and at one time would eagerly have helped to bind all in his net: nor did I feel thoroughly able to break its pernicious meshes, and get out of it myself for twelve years."<sup>28</sup>

The John Street Literary and Scientific Institution, where his first free-thought lectures were given, was an unusually spacious hall, and the headquarters of English Socialism. The four addresses were concerned with: the real, as separable from the symbolical character of Christ;

<sup>25</sup> *Harper's Magazine*, May, 1932.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, p. 261.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

the superiority of Jesus to all other moral philosophers; Christ's divinity [a truth hitherto mis-stated by priests]; and the perfectibility of moral character. Summaries of these addresses appeared in the *Reasoner* of September 15 and 22 and of October 6, 1847. Because of their sceptical nature they were, of course, particularly acceptable to this publication. An examination of them bears out the claim of the autobiography that the speaker was "never an 'Infidel Lecturer' in the common sense of the term."<sup>29</sup> The lecture on the real and symbolical character of Christ contained nothing which any liberal-minded Protestant of to-day, whether in the pulpit or out of it, would feel it necessary to deny. It allotted to the symbolical or allegorical part of the Christ story the immaculate conception, miraculous generation and birth, the star in the East and the visit of the magi, the whole of the miracles not explicable by natural principles, and also the resurrection. Jesus' real character, the lecturer maintained, "was simply that of a young Galilean, the humble son of a carpenter, comparatively uneducated, but born with a superior moral organisation, and capable by that natural endowment of a higher discernment of true morality than those around him." But there is no necessity for presenting a detailed synopsis of these addresses here; the writings of a score of modern religious leaders have made most intelligent people familiar with doctrines which in the 1840's could be preached only in Socialist halls.

Cooper says truly that although he did not at this time admit Christ's divinity, he again and again insisted on the perfect and worshipful moral beauty of Christ. If asked whether Christ's elevated teaching did not prove his supernatural mission, Cooper at this time answered in the negative, holding that the Galilean's message was: but the natural revelation of the human heart,—drawn from its deepest fountains. Christ needed no inspiration in the priestly sense of that word. If he were inspired, so was Confucius, who taught his precept 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you'

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 356.

five hundred years before him. \* \* \* If Christ was inspired, so was Socrates; so was Homer and Eschylus and Sophocles; so was Shakespere and Milton, and all who have astonished and elevated the human mind by the great products of poetry.<sup>30</sup>

Cooper's definition of divinity, Holyoake pointed out: like those of Thomas Carlyle, W. J. Fox, Emerson and Parker the Americans, together with the modern German Neologists \* \* \* congreud more or less with the Pantheism of Spinoza.<sup>31</sup>

Cooper himself states that during his twelve years as a sceptic he "never remained long in one state of belief or unbelief on the subject of Divine existence. \* \* \* Perhaps I was near Pantheism sometimes; while at other times I was a Theist \* \* \* but I did not sink into blank atheism."<sup>32</sup>

The autobiography, written long after Cooper's re-conversion, and after he had traveled for many years throughout Great Britain as an evangelist, reproduced several extracts from the lectures we are now considering, with arguments designed to show the fallacies which they were then said to contain. Cooper accurately describes himself at the turn of the century as "intent on convincing [himself] and others that there was nothing above humanity in the moral perfection of Christ, and that science and mental progress would bring in the reign of \* \* \* moral perfection."<sup>33</sup> One final quotation illustrating this point, and we may leave the subject for the time being.

Christ taught no sciences. How, where, when was he to learn them? Christ inculcated no education in any such sense of the word as we accept it; he never recommended cultivation of the pow-

<sup>30</sup> The Derby *Mercury* of September 22, 1847, joined the names of Emerson, Fox, and Cooper as preachers of a new religion which was described as follows: "The fundamental principle is to have a vague faith in everything, and a definite faith in nothing. They profess in religion what Morrison does in medicine, to extract the good out of every religion, and leave the bad. Their boast is, that what they are today they may not be tomorrow. They deem every great genius a lawful objection of adoration. \* \* \* The fall of man they either treat as an eastern allegory, or carefully leave it unnoticed; and the progressive perfectibility of human nature is the favorite theme of their orations. \* \* \* This system of intellectual hygaenism is rendered palatable by a mixture of German mysticism." [Quoted in *Reasoner*, iii:552].

<sup>31</sup> *Reasoner*, September 22, 1847.

<sup>32</sup> *Life*, pp. 361-362.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 365.

ers of the mind. How was it possible? Education, in his country, consisted of a knowledge of the Mosaic law [and of] the precepts of the Rabbis. \* \* \* His grand nature \* \* \* shrank from the fierceness and cruelty of the first, and it distinguished and selected what was excellent in \* \* \* the Rabbinical precepts. \* \* \* Dost thou say, priest, that I am seeking to dethrone him? I tell thee my worship of him is as ardent as thine. I tell thee \* \* \* that science will prepare his throne: that his 'Kingdom of Heaven' was no dream, save in the mode of its realization—but that Universal Knowledge will bring it. Not as Millerian fanatics tell—not as orthodox teachers prophecy. I speak of no 'coming in the flesh' or 'coming in the clouds;' but of the universal recognition of the great law of goodness and brotherhood."

Socialism and Secularism, both strongly anti-religious, possessed a large number of halls in London at this time. The nature of the activities of these "secular institutions" is well indicated by a descriptive circular issued by the Chelsea Institute of Political and Social Progress in 1847. Classes were offered in grammar, composition, drawing, French, singing, and dancing. A library, reading-room, lectures, and concerts were also provided. The purpose of the Institute was declared to be "the mental and moral elevation of the district by affording the means of obtaining true social and political knowledge." Class fees were regularly 6d. a week, but these were reduced to 2d. for those who could not afford more. Admission to the reading-room which was kept open on Sunday was a penny. Nearly all of the "institutions" at which Cooper spoke during the 1840's and 1850's offered a similar program of activities, and avowed a like purpose. Lovett's National Hall, in addition to classes for adults, carried on a highly successful day-school for children.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Reasoner*, October 6, 1847. Cf. *Life*, p. 364, where the passage is quoted with unimportant changes in sentence structure and punctuation.

<sup>35</sup> See *Utilitarian Record*, September 8, 1847 for prospectus of the Finsbury Literary Institution. In the "coffee-rooms" which were frequently attached to these institutions [or sometimes, as was the case with Cooper in Leicester, operated independently] lively discussion of political and economic questions took place nightly. Such discussions, Lovett affirmed, formed a real part of the education of the workers.

Like so many serious-minded Victorians, Cooper spent very little time upon mere amusement. During 1847 he did, however, occasionally attend the weekly gatherings of a group of his friends at the Crown Tavern in Fleet Street. Usually there were present his cousin Walter, two friends of the medical profession, Julian Harney the Chartist, and the minor writers James Devlin and William Thom.<sup>36</sup> It was the attractive personality of the Scotch rhymer which for a brief period held the small circle of friends together. Fox, who numbered amongst his acquaintance such famed talkers as Talfourd, Leigh Hunt, and Macready, declared that "Thom had the richest powers of conversation of any man he had ever known."<sup>37</sup> Talk and singing seem to have furnished the principal diversion at these gatherings at the Crown. Thom and Cooper each possessed

<sup>36</sup> The life of "Willie" Thom, as Cooper always affectionately called him, was a sufficiently tragic one. The publication of his unique work *Recollections in Rhyme* led to a subscription being raised for him which amounted to four hundred pounds, much of it contributed by Scotch merchants in India. With this Thom unwisely came up to London, where his small capital soon disappeared, by reason, Cooper says, of his continually yielding to people who urged him to sit up singing and drinking whiskey the whole night through. When his funds gave out Cooper repeatedly urged him to write something for Jerrold and Howitt, but the former weaver declared he had no heart to compose verse any more. After the death of his first wife Thom had married his servant. They were on the verge of starvation at the time of her delivery, which she performed herself, "without any help from a medical man, her own husband in the room." [Life, p. 314] Holyoake, who lived near by, when he heard of Mrs. Thom's condition "threw them his last sovereign, and ran out to seek the help the poor woman needed." [Life, p. 315]. A relief committee was formed, of which Cooper was a member, and for which he delivered gratis three lectures during October. Cooper also enlisted the support of P. A. Taylor [afterwards M. P. from Leicester] and his friends. By the interest of Sir William Forbes, forty pounds was obtained from the Literary Fund, and the unfortunate weaver was sent back to Dundee, after he had promised that he would return to the loom. He lived only a few weeks after his arrival in Scotland, and his wife died a few weeks later. Thom was the second of Cooper's literary friends [Thomas Miller being the other] to die in abject poverty. For contemporary articles on Thom see *Howitt's Journal*, iii:248 and *Reasoner*, ii:37-39.

<sup>37</sup> Life, p. 313. Cooper also states that when Miller heard Thom pouring out his picturesque thoughts, he exclaimed, "Why the devil don't you write such talk? It would bring you gold!" [Life, p. 347]. This sounds suspiciously like a well-known story regarding Meredith; but Cooper wrote it as early as 1878, and nowhere mentions having ever heard of Meredith.

a good singing voice, and both had written songs; they were frequently called upon, therefore—often to render their own compositions.

During the summer suspension of the National Hall lecturing, Cooper cast about for something to supplement his slight income from intermittent engagements at John Street and at the South Place Chapel. Thomas Miller, who had composed two or three books for boys [one of which, *The Boy's Country Book*, was long popular] suggested to Cooper that he, too, try his hand at writing for juveniles; and introduced him to Henry Vizatelly, who had the supervision of a juvenile series called "The Boy's Own Library," a publishing speculation in which Chapman and Hall were also interested. Vizatelly states that Cooper [whose early history he relates in an account which hardly contains a single completely accurate statement] "was painfully anxious to obtain employment," and that he was entrusted with the preparation of two volumes for the "Boy's Library."<sup>38</sup> Seven years later these books were published together in one volume under the title of *Triumphs of Perseverance and Enterprise*. The English publishers were Darton and Company, Holborn Hill, London; the American publishers, Evans and Dickerson, 697 Broadway, New York. Vizatelly paid Cooper twenty-five pounds for *Triumphs of Perseverance*; and ten pounds later for altering the *History of Enterprise* [as it was originally called] which was written by another person. Eventually the two volumes were made into one by some other hand.<sup>39</sup>

The first volume—that originally prepared by Cooper alone—tells briefly and moralizingly the life stories of famous men: among them the writers Gifford, Gibbon, and

<sup>38</sup> Vizatelly, Henry, *Glances Backward Through Seventy Years: autobiographical and other reminiscences*, 2 vols. London, 1893, i:308-310.

<sup>39</sup> The London edition [n. d.] was printed by William Stevens, Temple Bar, and contained 280 pp. and more than fifty engravings. The New York edition [1854] was also printed in England by W. Lewis & Sons, Cornhill. It contained 376 pp. and only the first volume *Triumphs of Perseverance*, was illustrated. A copy of this last edition is in the New York Public Library.

Dr. Johnson; the linguists Sir William Jones and Dr. Samuel Lee; the artists Salvator Rosa and Benjamin West; and the scientists William Herschel and Humphrey Davy. The second and it must be confessed more interesting volume, which Cooper merely revised, relates examples of "enterprise" as displayed in exploration, the search for antiquities [particularly in Egypt], combats with wild animals, and in feats of engineering ancient and modern. The preface to the whole book states that it was written "with a view to inspire the youthful reader with a glow of emulation, and to induce him to toil and advance in the peaceful achievements of science and benevolence." The preface to the second part warns the young reader that in the instances of enterprise presented he will find that beneficence was not the invariable stimulant to action; "but where the actor displays a deficiency in the high quality of mercy, the reader is recommended to think and judge for himself."

Although patently hack work, Cooper is justified in complaining that he received but poor pay for it. Sufficiently popular at the time to call for further editions, the work would interest few modern boys, if for no other reason than that it is so heavily didactic. The most frequent purchasers of the book were doubtless conscientious grown-ups anxious for the moral improvement of the rising generation.

Almost to the end of his life Cooper was compelled to supplement his meager income by such petty tasks as this. In spite of performing "nearly as much work as a steam-engine," as Howitt expressed it, he could not earn more than enough to pay current expenses and discharge the legacy of debt resulting from his two trials and quixotic generosity in Leicester. Gammage cites as still another instance of his open-handed generosity that after "Daddy" Richards was released, Cooper, who had become greatly attached to him in prison, quietly sent him a small sum weekly when he became too feeble to work longer. Apparently the pension was continued until the old man's death a few years later.

In September of 1874 Cooper resumed lecturing at John Street, beginning with addresses on the revolt of Spartacus, the conspiracy of Masaniello and the fishermen of Naples, and the rebellion of Wat Tyler. These were given on Sunday evenings at 8:00 until his resumption of Sunday evening lecturing at the National Hall compelled a change to 11 o'clock on Sunday mornings. Such morning lectures had not previously been successful, but Cooper's proved so popular that they were continued until the end of the year. His principal subjects at these morning gatherings were the great religious leaders from Luther to Swedenborg, and of three great thinkers of the eighteenth century, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke. In the evenings of these same Sundays he lectured at the National Hall on political conditions in Italy and Spain, and upon Dryden, Pope, Godwin, Scott, and Cowper. On November 23 and 30 he lectured at the Goswell Road Institution upon Burns and Byron, and on December 5 again substituted for Fox at the South Place Chapel. On Christmas Day he delivered an address at John Street on the life and genius of Handel. At this institution which possessed both a choir and an organ, Cooper could again indulge his passion for music, and he succeeded in introducing into the programs compositions of Haydn, Mozart, Handel, and Beethoven. To Cooper "one of the great charms of these evenings was the music," but the type of composition sometimes rendered led Holyoake to comment tartly:

How often do we hear after a lecture on an anti-theological subject, the John Street Choir sing "Hallelujah!" or "Open the Everlasting Gates," \* \* \* or some other rhapsody more unsuitable still. No matter whether the lecturer is right or wrong, his intended impression is defeated, and his earnestness made ridiculous by such a conclusion."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Reasoner*, December, 1847.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS

Unquiet refugees from the continental reaction were abundant in London during 1847-1848, and Cooper came into contact with several of them. His interest in the Italian struggle for liberty manifested itself as early as 1845, when, at the anniversary dinner of the Democratic Association he moved a toast to Mazzini in language so exalted that to one historian it seemed as though "his excellent and copious sentiments [must have] been stimulated by the refreshments he had taken."<sup>1</sup>

Another London organization in which Chartists and revolutionaries from France, Germany, Hungary, and Poland mingled freely was the Society of Fraternal Democrats. Karl Marx, who addressed this organization in German on November 27, 1847, stated that "the Democrats of Belgium felt that the Chartists of England were the real Democrats, and that the moment they carried the Six Points of the Charter the road to Liberty would be open to the whole world." Marx also urged the calling of a congress of nations to be composed solely of workingmen, for the purpose of establishing liberty all over the world.<sup>2</sup> Although the Chartists as a body never actively cham-

<sup>1</sup> West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 229. Cf. *Northern Star*, August 11, 1845. With reference to West's insinuation, it may be stated that when O'Connor in 1849 charged that Cooper had been in turn teetotal, abstemious, and boozy, Cooper replied: "You ought to be ashamed to apply the term 'boozy' to one who was never degraded by drinking habits in his life \* \* \* who in fourteen years has never been in a [public] house except to take refreshment when he was exhausted talking or journeying, and then never to incur any danger of inebriation. You know that I only broke my teetotalism of some years from sheer exhaustion of frame, [and upon] medical advice after my imprisonment. \* \* \* I never gave offence, however, to conscientious teetotalers \* \* \* I am too glad to see temperance spread to throw any obstacle in its way willingly." *Northern Star*, April 28, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 235.

pioned any foreign cause, certain of their leaders were advocating the program "Workers of the world, unite!" some years before this slogan became the property of Marxist Socialism. Among such internationally-minded working-class leaders must be reckoned Thomas Cooper.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1847 Cooper published in *Howitt's Journal*, then just commencing, an irregular ode of eighty-one lines entitled "Europe's Hope in the New Year." In this poem the revolutionary ferment in Poland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, Sweden, France, Spain, and Portugal is described and extolled in a series of turgid stanzas, which conclude with a bitter arraignment of England for the wrongs inflicted upon Ireland.<sup>4</sup> To the same periodical he contributed a few weeks later a "Sonnet to the Americans," reminding this country, which had recently drawn the sword for war upon Mexico, that:

The sword hath edges twain, and swift may fall  
Upon yourselves, forgetful of the cries  
Of sable millions that ye hold in thrall.<sup>5</sup>

Both pieces, unfortunately, are poor poetry; and Cooper never reprinted either.

In this same year he was appointed by Mazzini to membership in the Council of the People's International League. According to its secretary, W. J. Linton, this League sought to accomplish a three-fold purpose: to enlighten the British public regarding political conditions in foreign countries; to make manifest an efficient public opinion favoring the right of every people to national self-government; and to promote good understanding between the people of England and the people of other countries.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Joseph McCabe, it is true, records certain minor incidents of an opposite tendency, stating, *e. g.*, that "In 1848 Cooper asked Holyoake to spare readers of the *Reasoner* further accounts of the 'Democratic Firebrands,' and grumbled that 'the tone of the foreigners did not suit him,' also that he once remonstrated with Moll against the foreign emphasis upon physical force." *Op. cit.*, 1:127-8 and 132.

<sup>4</sup> *Howitt's Journal*, January 16, 1847.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, February 6, 1847.

<sup>6</sup> Linton, W. J. *Three Score Years and Ten*, N. Y. 1894 [pub. London, 1895, under title of *Memories*], p. 98.

When he organized the League in 1847, Mazzini had been ten years in England, during which time he had formed the acquaintance of nearly all the radicals and liberals in London, twenty-four of whom he brought together to form the Council of the new organization. In addition to Cooper the Council membership included Dr. John Bowring, T. S. Duncombe, and W. J. Fox [all M.P.'s]; Joseph Toynbee [father of Arnold Toynbee]; Thornton Hunt [son of Leigh Hunt];<sup>7</sup> James Watson, Henry Vincent, W. J. Linton,<sup>8</sup> and fifteen others.<sup>9</sup> Although Mazzini founded the League and wrote its first manifesto, he had no official connection with it. Nevertheless "it was Mazzini himself," Cooper testifies, [who] was our great source of inspiration."<sup>10</sup> Weekly meetings were held at the home of the secretary, 85 Hatton Gardens. Cooper has left the following account of one such gathering at which Mazzini was present.

I remember one evening Mazzini had been describing to us the strong hope he had that an effective, but secret, movement for the

<sup>7</sup> Mazzini unsuccessfully endeavored to persuade Leigh Hunt himself to join the Council. See quotation from Mazzini's letter to him in Barnette Miller's *Leigh Hunt's Relations with Byron, Shelley, and Keats*, N. Y., 1910, p. 17, note 40.

<sup>8</sup> W. J. Linton, the famous wood engraver, was born in 1812. In 1866, after disposing of his retreat at "Brantwood" to Ruskin, he emigrated to America, and spent the closing years of his life in this country. Linton wielded the pen almost as skilfully as the graver; issuing several volumes of original verse, usually with illustrations engraved by himself. Professor Elton has words of praise for his "deft and accomplished translations from Villon and other French poets." Linton was a life-long republican and radical, and founded two periodicals: the short-lived *English Republic* [1854], and the still vigorous London *Illustrated News*. After settling down in New Haven, Connecticut, Linton did much for the advancement of wood engraving in his adopted country. In January, 1882, the *Century Magazine* published his unsigned article "Who Were the Chartists?" illustrated with portraits engraved by himself—among them that of Thomas Cooper. Linton published his "memories" four years before his death [which occurred in New Haven in 1898] at the age of eighty-six.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper states that the *Times* described the League as "a company composed of some Great Unknowns and several Little Knowns, with some Doctors of Medicine and certain lately imprisoned Chartists, whose united design was to revolutionize all Europe, and to say who should govern this country and who should govern that."—*Reasoner*, October 20, 1847. For a complete list of the membership of the Council see West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 231.  
<sup>10</sup> *Life*, p. 299.

overthrow of the Austrian tyranny, was being organized in his beloved Italy. He then made a strong appeal to us whether English lovers of liberty should not show their sympathy with arms. I ventured to say that I felt doubtful whether it was consistent for some of us who were lamenting the physical force folly of our own country, and were often and openly protesting against it, to conspire for aiding other people with arms. Young Peter Taylor followed me on the same side. But before any other could speak, Mazzini sprang up.

"Mr. Cooper you are right about your own country," he said—and those wondrous eyes of his lit up with a power that was almost overwhelming, "you are right about your own country. You have had your grand decisive struggle against Tyrannous Power. Your fathers brought it to the block; and you have now a Representation, and you have Charters and Written Rights to appeal to. You need no physical force. Your countrymen only need a will, and a union to express it, and you can have all you need. But what are my countrymen to do, who are trodden under the iron heel of a foreign tyranny? who are watched, seized, and imprisoned before anyone knows what has become of them? What are my countrymen to do I ask you? They have no Representation—they have no Charters—they have no written Rights. What must my countrymen do? *They must fight!*"

We were all subdued, for he was unanswerable.<sup>11</sup>

For the League R. H. Horne, W. J. Linton, and Thomas Cooper during the winter of 1847-1848 delivered seventeen lectures upon political conditions in Switzerland and Italy.<sup>12</sup> Upon the outbreak of the French communist revolution in February, 1848, Mazzini, Linton, and others hurried to Paris, to convey the congratulations of the League to the new government. Mazzini then continued on to Italy, and after his departure the new organization soon collapsed.<sup>13</sup>

Cooper had one further contact with Mazzini, however, in connection with the repatriation of his former language teacher D'Albrione. After concluding his language lessons in 1846, and setting off as special correspondent for *Jerrold's paper*, Cooper lost sight of the Napoleonic veteran. Passing over Blackfriars Bridge in the fall of 1847 he no-

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>12</sup> Linton, W. J., *Three Score and Ten Years*, p. 102. One of Cooper's lectures on Switzerland was abstracted in the *Reuisoner* of October 20, 1847.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103; and West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 239.

ticed a ragged figure leaning upon the parapet. A certain air of desperation indicated that the man was considering suicide in the river beneath.<sup>14</sup> Cooper approached, and upon speaking to the unfortunate was shocked to discover that it was D'Albrione. His teaching had fallen off until he was on the verge of starvation and reduced to a condition of raggedness which finally made it impossible for him to obtain any employment whatever. After relieving his immediate wants, Cooper continued to aid him and finally found him some employment. In 1848 the expatriated Italian expressed a desire to return to his native city, Turin. Cooper not only raised the funds necessary for his traveling expenses, but also sent off a letter to Mazzini, who "touched with the misfortunes of his countryman \* \* \* effectually opened the exile's path back to his birthplace."<sup>15</sup>

Cooper's interest in foreign affairs did not cease with the demise of the International People's League; in fact his engagement at National Hall came to an abrupt conclusion because instead of continuing to lecture on Sunday evenings upon such subjects as "Geology," "Astronomy," "Human Invention" and the "Elegant Art," as had been announced, he insisted upon lecturing on the political situation in France. The lecture committee, which had not authorized the change, was offended; and Cooper's engagement was terminated.

For the rest of this year he lectured principally at the John Street institution, with occasional visits to other "Halls of Science" and Mechanics Institutes. At John Street he commenced a series of week-day addresses on Tuesday nights on the general subject of "Privilege", which he declared had been "the greatest curse of Society ever since its institution."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Professor Cazamian believes this incident may have suggested to Kingsley the suicide of one of the characters towards the end of *Alton Locke*.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 310.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Tom Johnson's remark to Lincoln Steffens: "Whether it's a big steam railroad that wants a franchise, or a little gambling-house that wants not to be raided, a temperance society that wants a law passed, a poor little prostitute, or a big merchant occupying

The successful uprising in France suggested to James Watson the desirability of establishing a new Chartist organization which would declare for republicanism. At the organization meeting Watson was unanimously chosen as President of the new society, but he shortly afterwards resigned in Cooper's favor. The first public meeting of the new organization took place on March 9th on National Hall, its purpose being to receive a report from Linton and Collet, then newly returned from Paris. Cooper was one of the speakers at this meeting, which elected him a member of the new society's Committee of Observation.<sup>17</sup> On March 10 a second meeting was held, attended by 3000 persons, at the Eastern Institution, Commercial Road, for the purpose of congratulating the French republicans on their recent successes. Cooper again acted as chairman of the meeting, which adjourned, as on the previous occasion, to the strains of the *Marseillaise*.<sup>18</sup> Five days later the new organization issued a manifesto addressed "To the Unrepresented Classes of Great Britain and Ireland," and headed "The People's Charter," which began:

Fellow-Countrymen—

The time has arrived for another movement. \* \* \* Follow the example of France! Not the example of arms and the barricades; you need not such means while your right of public meeting remains unassailed. Follow the example of France, not in the letter, but in the spirit, in accordance with our different circumstances. Be as the French have been, firm and temperate in demand, cool and devoted in your conduct. Let your conduct contradict those who would have the name of Chartist mean rioter. We are not rioters. We have nothing to do with aimless brawls in the streets, or outrages on any class or portion of society. We seek not to injure any; but we will not be injured. We demand our political rights, that justice may no longer be denied us. \* \* \* Meet in your thousands and tens of thousands to demand your rights. Meet peacefully, legally, frequently! Require of the authorities in your several localities that they also assist you in your constitutional courses. \* \* \* On their heads, not on yours, be the responsibility of disturbance. \* \* \*

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an alley for storage—it's those who seek privileges who corrupt; it's those who possess privileges that defend our corrupt politics."

*Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, N. Y., 1931, p. 479.

<sup>17</sup> *Reasoner*, March 15, 1848.

<sup>18</sup> *Reasoner*, March 22, 1848.

Establish your associations throughout the land! \* \* \* From this moment cease not to agitate, day after day, from end to end of the land, until the People's Charter shall become the established law.

This proclamation was signed by eleven prominent radicals "On Behalf of the Democratic Committee of Observation on the French Revolution." Cooper's name headed the list.<sup>19</sup> Such a fiery pronouncement, with its repeated appeals to "Follow the example of France!" may have helped to convince the authorities that on April 10 the Chartists must be dealt with in terms of troops and special constables.

For the date mentioned O'Connor had announced a great demonstration, to commence with a monster meeting on Kensington Common and conclude with an enormous procession to the bar of the House of Commons, there to present a third petition, alleged to bear the signatures of six million Englishmen, and to demand the passage of the Charter. So great was the fear aroused by the preparations for this demonstration of Chartist strength that the government placed the Duke of Wellington in charge of a most elaborate system of safeguards against the possibility of an uprising. These included, in addition to the appointment of hundreds of thousands of special constables, the erection of sandbag barricades around the Post Office, and the stationing of picked bodies of artillery, dragoons, and infantry at strategic points, especially at the bridges leading out of London. The fears of those in authority, which are reflected by certain nineteenth century historians as well as by Kingsley, appear to have magnified the actual danger considerably,<sup>20</sup> although it did look for a time as though Chartist might be successful in forcing the ac-

<sup>19</sup> For a list of the signers and the full text of the manifesto see *Reasoner*, March 22, 1848.

<sup>20</sup> The most extensive discussion of the events of April 10, 1848, is probably that contained in the Appendix to Theodore Rothstein's *From Chartism to Labourism*, London, 1929. This account, the work of a Russian, treats the affair as of supreme moment. G. J. Holroyde, who was in London and saw what happened attacks the account of Kingsley in the Preface to *Alton Locke* as grossly exaggerated [*Bygones Worth Remembering*, i:74-82]. Cf. Slosson, P. *Decline of the Chartist Movement*, pp. 138-141.

ceptance of its program in this year of revolutions. But because of lack of proper organization, due in part to the folly and cowardice of O'Connor, and because of the government's superiority in numbers and in strategy, the great tenth of April demonstration proved in the event a miserable failure. Once having left the city for the monster meeting, the Chartists were not permitted to return over the guarded bridges, so that no procession accompanied the Petition to Westminster, and Parliament succeeded in making that document ridiculous by proving that there were actually less than two million signatures, and that many of these were the work of practical-jokers, who signed as Victoria Rex, Pug-nose, Mr. Punch; and other names, "too obscene", it was stated, "to affront the dignity of the House by repeating."

On April 5 the new organization with which Cooper was now affiliated called a third public meeting at National Hall, at which it was decided to form a People's Charter Union. A motion that the new society join O'Connor's National Chartist Association was rejected, but resolutions were passed expressing sympathy with the new French Republic, and congratulating those who had established it upon their success. Election of officers took place in Farringdon Hall on April 10, Thomas Cooper being elected President and Richard Moore, Treasurer. The council included Hetherington, Watson, Holyoake, and Collet.<sup>21</sup> The disintegration of Chartism following the events of this historic tenth of April made it impossible for the new body to do much for the Charter, but it was a special committee of the People's Charter Union which a year later began an agitation against newspaper stamp duties which was continued for twenty-one years, until these "taxes on knowledge"<sup>22</sup> had been entirely abolished. Although this reform was accomplished without Cooper's active assistance,

<sup>21</sup> West, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

<sup>22</sup> This phrase is said to have been invented by Leigh Hunt. A complete account of the agitation is given in C. D. Collet's *History of the Taxes on Knowledge*, 2 vols., 1899. Towards the close of 1850 the committee which carried on the struggle forced the Committee

he was certainly sympathetic towards it, for as early as 1842 we find him protesting against government attempts to curtail the influence of the press, "either by prosecution or by the imposition of taxes on knowledge."<sup>23</sup>

The incident of a pseudo-Chartist conspiracy to seize London after the city had been set on fire by a chemical composition that would cause stone to burn [which Kingsley introduces into the thirty-third chapter of *Alton Locke*] actually happened to Cooper about this time, and is described in the autobiography in a long and detailed account covering five pages. He there tells how a villainous *agent-provacateur* whom he had recognized as a police spy had succeeded in inveigling an elderly politician of his acquaintance into a plot to fire London by means of a secret chemical composition, after which there was to be a general uprising led by the Irish Confederates. The detail and circumstance with which Cooper relates the affair,<sup>24</sup> and the fact that Kingsley had sought him out during this year and included in *Alton Locke* many other circumstances related to him by Cooper, indicate conclusively that despite Kingsley's earlier version of a similar incident, the adventure was really Cooper's. Owing to his feuds with O'Connor and Ernest Jones, Cooper was henceforth, as he himself expresses it, "cut off, happily, from the later Chartist history of violence and failure."<sup>25</sup>

After leaving National Hall, Cooper was able to speak at John Street on Sunday evenings. His subjects there during the first part of 1848 included Dr. Johnson, Daniel Defoe, Plato, John Bunyan, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus,

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of Stamps to take action against Dickens' *Household Narrative of Current Events*, which came within the legal definition of a newspaper. Trial was delayed until December, 1851, when a jury increased the confusion of the revenue officials by acquitting the periodical. That these newspaper taxes did succeed in withholding knowledge from the workers is evident when one remembers how low wages were for several decades after Waterloo, and that six-pence was the lowest price at which a paper could be legally and profitably sold before the taxes were removed.

<sup>23</sup> *Northern Star*, February 19, 1842.

<sup>24</sup> *Life*, pp. 303-308.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

and the Transmigration of Souls. At Finsbury Institute and the Gould Square Mechanics Institute he lectured on "the poets of freedom," Byron and Shelley. During the spring of this year his weekly lectures at John Street dealt with the French revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848. The lectures on Napoleon and the first French revolution were repeated at Finsbury Hall and the City Mechanics Institute. Holyoake was so impressed by Cooper's address on "Prospects of the French People" that he gave it eleven pages in his small periodical, omitting other material to do so. The speaker's republican principles at this date, which were destined to prove short-lived, developed to a large extent out of his admiration for the heroes of the Commonwealth. That early great experiment had failed, he believed, because the pure draught of liberty had been mixed with the vinegar of Puritanism. The English people had since drunk the poisoned cup of royalty to the dregs, and would if they were wise now throw away both drug and cup together.<sup>26</sup>

In another of his addresses on the French Revolution Cooper found occasion to refer to the constantly increasing use of machinery, which every year threw thousands of men out of employment, far more than could be offset by any Malthusian scheme of checking population increase. Yet he was not one of those who would abolish machines; his objection was that thus far they had merely served to increase the power and riches and insolence of the capitalists. Moreover, unless the existing state of society were changed, "capital must grow into still greater masses, and poverty consequently be doubled and tripled \* \* \* Capital must increase by driving the human hand out of the

<sup>26</sup> *Reasoner*, September 6, 1848. Cooper's incidental reference in this lecture to the Chamber of Deputies' "trifling debates on a Divorce Bill, and other petty propositions" drew a warm rejoinder from Linton, who wrote that he could not "quietly hear characterized as a petty proposition that right of Divorce whose 'doctrine and discipline' engaged much the mind of our magnificent Milton [and] whose just settlement is perhaps of more importance than any law which Parliament can be called upon to consider." *Reasoner*, August 16, 1848.

market; the human hand must have less and less wages; and consequently the human being less clothes and food—and some none.”<sup>27</sup> This is the pure Marxian gospel; yet *Das Kapital* [the first volume of which appeared in 1867] was still almost twenty years in the future.

Cooper’s remedy for the evil state of affairs which he analyzed so clearly was, first the enfranchisement of the toilers, and secondly their education. “Get Knowledge!” he cried; “it will enlighten the brain, it will fire the heart, it will stir up the blood, it will nerve the hand to win freedom.”<sup>28</sup> “The real division in Chartist ranks,” Professor Slosson points out, “was between those who like O’Connor and O’Brien were forever looking backward to the former prosperous days of the English laborer and seeking to restore conditions which had forever passed away, and those who like Lovett and Cooper accepted the changes of the industrial revolution and sought a remedy in the intellectual and moral development and regeneration of the workingmen.”<sup>29</sup>

Four lectures on Papal History<sup>30</sup> were followed by three addresses on the “people, genius, and present revolutionary condition of Germany.” In these last, after sketching the rise of the Prussian state from 1640 on the speaker concluded with a survey of the modern history of Germany which culminated in “a thrilling peroration on the growing democratic mind of Germany, and the high hopes and resolves for exertion thence to be derived by disciples of freedom.”<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately the German uprising of ‘48 proved to be but a flash in the pan.

In these lectures Cooper classified the motivating forces of past civilizations as: first, religion; second, con-

<sup>27</sup> *Reasoner*, August 16, 1848.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Slosson, P., *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> The lecture “From the Early Popes to Gregory the Great” was abstracted in the *Reasoner* of September 20, 1848. Gregory’s decree forbidding the secular clergy to marry Cooper called an act against nature whose only parallel in the history of tyrannies was the new Poor Law.

<sup>31</sup> *Reasoner*, July 30, 1848.

quest; and, third, commerce. Two principles as yet untried, which he hoped would inspire the civilization of the future, were: cooperation and fraternity.

An interesting letter from Cooper to Holyoake, not dated, but apparently written about the beginning of 1848, refers to Cooper's taking tea with Carlyle and his friends Sir Harry <sup>32</sup> and Lady Verney. Cooper wrote:

My dear Holyoake:

The baronet was very earnest in his questioning last night; and Thomas Carlyle boldly denounced abuses and laissez-faire, according to his wont. He declared his conviction roundly that the enactment of the Charter is at hand—though he does not believe it will result in immediate benefit to the people. Profitable employment for the people is what we want, he says, and says justly. We entered largely into that all-important subject, and Sir Harry Verney eagerly and pointedly inquired what workingmen proposed in that direction for themselves. I gave him some brief and imperfect account of Minter Morgan's plans, of Fourierism and communism, and at his desire have promised to send him a list of books unfolding what those plans and system are.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion Cooper asked for Holyoake's aid in compiling such a list.

Cooper himself was responsible for one work which might have been included in such a bibliography, a little pamphlet entitled *Land for the Labourers* which he translated from the French of a British ex-patriate. The panacea offered was evidently inspired by the schemes then being put into effect in France by Louis Blanc, of whom Cooper was an admirer,<sup>34</sup> and whose ideas regarding the organization of labor he described in several of his lectures. Before considering this pamphlet further, a brief quota-

<sup>32</sup> "Verney was an evangelical Christian of broad sympathies, ex-soldier and attache, and for the last fifteen years M. P. for Buckingham." Wilson, D. A., *Carlyle on Cromwell and Others*, p. 406.

<sup>33</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *Op. cit.*, 1: 127-128.

<sup>34</sup> The following year Cooper wrote: "English workingmen are not generally the disciples of M. Louis Blanc [whose name I mention with deep respect] in the point of doctrine wherein he insists on an *equality* in sharing profits of labour. But among the workmen of the manufacturing districts universally is the yearning desire for such an 'Organization of Labour' as shall take some decided form of partnership."—*Plain Speaker*, May 5, 1849.

tion setting forth Cooper's own similar ideas may be of interest. In one of the lectures on the French Revolution previously mentioned he stated:

That one great resource remains to the wise statesman. \* \* \* I am deeply convinced. The uncultivated land of this country—fifteen millions of acres it is stated to amount to in the United Kingdom [I mean of cultivable land, and excluding from calculation rocky and utterly irreclaimable ground]—what a wide and unexplored field does it not afford for the 'surplus labour' of England, Scotland, Ireland \* \* \* Why not place colonies of husbandmen on the waste land? They tell me that the population from the agricultural districts swamp the manufacturing towns, and is the main cause of starvation there. Why not prevent this? \* \* \* Home colonies [I mean home colonies on an internal system, some such system as Louis Blanc's] would commence the true reform which is needed.<sup>35</sup>

The message of *Land for the Labourers* is somewhat of the same sort, though it proceeds one step farther, in that it advocates that in France the state take over all the land, disregarding the protests of private owners. This fifteen-page pamphlet,<sup>36</sup> although listed in the bibliographies of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* as the work of Cooper,<sup>37</sup> is not of his original composition. In the "Advertisement" preceding the text, dated May 1, 1848, Cooper explains that:

The following paper has been widely circulated in Paris, where it has caused the greatest interest. It is esteemed to be the consistent consequence of the policy pursued by the Provisional Government; which, it is presumed, will not be negatived by the National Assembly. Perhaps no document so well illustrates what is really going on in France, and what is studiously kept out of sight by the great part of the periodical press both in Paris and in London. I have only to add that the author of the paper is personally known to me, and is a native of Britain, but has been twenty years resident in France, and that the translation has been submitted to him, and has received his own corrections.

<sup>35</sup> *Reasoner*, August 16, 1848.

<sup>36</sup> Its title page reads: "The Land for the Labourers and the Fraternity of Nations: a scheme for a new industrial system, just published in Paris, and intended for proposal into the National Assembly. Edited by Thomas Cooper, Author of 'The Purgatory of Suicides.' London: Effingham Wilson, 11, Royal Exchange." [n. d. 15 pp.]

<sup>37</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, xiv: 471.

In brief summary the pamphlet's thesis is as follows. Since the contest arising from competition creates as great ravages in the ranks of the laboring class as military struggles create amongst the regiments on a battle-field, the next work of the Republic, "now firmly established," must be radical social reform. To accomplish this the Government must organize industry in such a way as to give productive employment to all workmen; for work is the right and duty of all. The existing disorganization and unemployment, which is daily opening an abyss beneath the feet of the new republic, can be cured only if the State has absolute control over all the instruments of labor, and this is possible only if private ownership of land is abolished. The source of all oppression is special privilege, and the worst of all privileges are usury [i.e. interest in any amount on capital] and rent in all its forms. Every man has a right to convert part of his gains into capital, but no man has a right to make his capital the instrument of oppression by lending it out at interest. Since rent and interest are neither right in themselves, nor in harmony with fraternal liberty, they must be abolished. The free and voluntary association of labor, land, and capital alone can conciliate all interests. As private owners of the land will doubtless not be willing to enter voluntarily into such an association it will be necessary for the state to purchase the land [how it may do so is explained in one and one-half pages] and then for labor to form free associations both in the country parishes and in the cities. The whole communistic scheme, which in many ways curiously anticipates Sovietism, is summed up at the end in the following proposed proclamation:

Salary and usury are abolished.

The Gospel is the law of the land.

The globe is given by God to humanity.

The monopoly of land is an iniquity.

Labor will be organized in town and country.

Liberty, equality, and fraternity are the rights of all.

Professional education shall be given to all.

The universal confederation of republics guarantees the peace of the world.

The simplicity which could expect the carrying out of such a plan by mere fiat scarcely requires comment. Three years later the "firmly-established" republic had given way to the Second Empire of its erstwhile president.

W. E. Forster was in Paris during May and June of 1848 with a party which included Emerson and Monckton Milnes. After his return to England he wrote Cooper:

I have my head, and I hope my heart, full of this question of organization of labour; but I confess, as yet, I see but very darkly. Have you any plan? All French brains are now trying to solve the problem, but I look for little help from them, they are so superficial. \* \* \* The worst of all Socialist schemes I have seen is that all have within them, more or less concealed, a damning desire to shirk work. Neither you nor I must be ever discouraged by abuse from either *ouvrier* or *bourgeois*.<sup>\*</sup>

Cooper had met Emerson before he went over to France. On the eve of the memorable tenth of April of this year Cooper was one of the guests at a reception given by Dr. Garth Wilkinson at his home in Hampstead to honor the illustrious traveler. "He was the only American," Cooper candidly avows, "in whose company I ever felt real enjoyment. The few Americans I have ever met displayed too much of my own native mood—the imperative—to render them pleasant companions."<sup>\*\*</sup> His strictures upon Margaret Fuller, whom he met twice, include notice of the nasal pronunciation which English ears seldom fail to detect in American speech.

She talked in a nasal tone [he complains] and lifted up her head to shout, so as to be heard by all in the room—behaviour so utterly foreign to an Englishman's sense of womanliness! Emerson did not talk in his nose, and why any American should I cannot see. Emerson's talk was gentle and good; and his manners were those of a quiet English gentleman. I walked into London with him—as he had intimated a wish to walk. It was Sunday evening; and he made observations on a host of subjects, as we gently walked on,—for he would not hurry. Religion, Politics, Literature—ours, and America's; he seemed eager to learn all he could. He seemed to think and talk without pride or conceit, and with remarkable com-

<sup>\*</sup> Reid, T. Wemyss, *Life of W. E. Forster*, 1:245-246.  
<sup>\*\*</sup> *Life*, p. 312.

mon-sense, so far as my humble judgment went. I could say anything to him—but I could not talk to Margaret Fuller.<sup>40</sup>

In the following month Charles Kingsley, whose indebtedness to his knowledge of Cooper's career in the writing of *Alton Locke*<sup>41</sup> has been so frequently alluded to, introduced himself to the Chartist poet by letter. Kingsley wrote this communication about a fortnight after his return from London, to which he had gone to attend a meeting of Chartist leaders and followers of Frederick Denison Maurice.<sup>42</sup> The letter, which was written from Eversley under date of June 19, 1848, began:

Ever since I read your brilliant poem, "The Purgatory of Suicides," and its most affecting preface, I have been possessed by a desire to thrust myself, at all risks, into your acquaintance. The risk which I felt keenly, was the fear that you might distrust me, as a clergyman; having, I am afraid, no great reason to love that body of men. Still, I thought, the poetic spirit ought to be a bond of communion between us. Shall God make us brother poets, as well as brother men, and we refuse to fraternize? I thought also that you, if you have a poet's heart, as well as a poet's brain which you have manifested, ought to be more able than other men to appreciate and sympathize with my feelings towards "the working classes." You can understand why I held back—from shame—a false shame, perhaps, lest you should fancy me a hypocrite. But my mind was made up when I found an attack in the "Commonwealth" on certain papers which I had published in "Politics for the People,"

<sup>40</sup> *Life*, p. 312. There is no reference to Cooper in Emerson's *Journal*; in fact there is no entry at all for April 9, 1848. The entry for April 6 reads in part: "I heard that there is to be a Chartist revolution on Monday next and an Irish revolution in the following week [Cf. Cooper—"The Irish Confederates \* \* \* had promised to bring out all their force; and when resistance was overcome—if any were offered—a Republican government would be formed." *Life*, p. 305]. People here expect a revolution. There will be no revolution; none that deserves to be called so. There may be a scramble for money. When I see changed men I will look for a changed world."

<sup>41</sup> "Le plan général, un partie des thèmes, et plusiers incidents d'*Alton Locke* ont été suggérés à Kingsley par l'exemple et la carrière de Cooper." Cazamian, L., *Kingsley et Thomas Cooper*, Paris, 1903, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> These meetings, one of the first steps in the social experiment later denominated Christian Socialism, were the result of a suggestion made to Maurice by Walter Cooper, a cousin of Thomas Cooper [*Life of Frederick Denison Maurice* by his Son, N. Y., 1884 [2 vols.] ii:519]. The first was held on April 28, 1848. Maurice first wrote to Kingsley about these meetings on April 28 [*Ibid.*, pp. 538-9] Kingsley first attended on June 4.

under the name of Parson Lot. Now I had hailed with cordial pleasure the appearance of the "Commonwealth," and sympathized thoroughly with it—and here was this very "Commonwealth" attacking me on some of the very points on which I most agreed with it. It seemed to me intolerable to be so misunderstood. It had been long intolerable to me to be regarded as an object of distrust and aversion by thousands of my countrymen, my equals in privilege, and too often, alas! far my superiors in worth, just because I was a clergyman, the very office which *ought* to have testified above all others for liberty, equality, brotherhood, for time and eternity. I felt myself bound, then, to write to you, to see if among the nobler spirits of the working classes I could not make one friend who would understand me. My ancestors fought in Cromwell's army, and left all for the sake of God and liberty, among the pilgrim fathers; and here were men accusing me of "medieval tyranny." I would shed the last drop of my life blood for the social and political emancipation of the people of England, as God is my witness; and here are the very men for whom I would die, fancying me an "aristocrat." It is not enough for me that they are mistaken in me. I want to work with them. I want to realize my brotherhood with them. I want some one like yourself, intimately acquainted with the mind of the working classes, to give me such an insight into their life and thoughts, as may enable me to consecrate my powers effectively to their service. For them I have lived several years. I come to you to ask you if you can tell me how to live more completely for them. If you distrust and reject my overtures, I shall not be astonished—pained I shall be—and you must know as well as I, that there is no bitterer pain than to be called a rogue because you are honester than your neighbors, and a time-server, because you have intellect enough to see both sides of a question. If you will allow me to call on you, you will very much oblige me. I send you my poem [The Saint's Tragedy] as something of a "sample." At first sight it may seem to hanker after feudalism and the middle ages. I trust to you to see a deeper and somewhat more democratic moral in it. \* \* \* <sup>43</sup>

Cooper's reply we do not have,<sup>44</sup> but to one of his impulsive and warmhearted temperament there could be only

<sup>43</sup> *Letters and Memories of Charles Kingsley*, edited by his wife, [2 vols.] being vol. VII of the *Works of Charles Kingsley*, Cambridge edn, Phila., n. d. 1:157-159. This source [to be distinguished from the abridged one volume edition [N. Y. 1884] which I also cite] will be referred to hereafter as *Letters and Memories*.

<sup>44</sup> Cooper generously forwarded to Mrs. Kingsley all his letters to and from her husband, for use in the preparation of the biography just referred to, the only one of Kingsley yet written. It is to be hoped that the complete correspondence will some day be available.

one kind of response to such an appeal. The acquaintance thus begun ripened into a sincere and lasting friendship, terminated only by Kingsley's death. Kingsley's ignorance of Chartists and Chartism until after he met Cooper is evidenced by the letter to his wife written two weeks earlier upon his returning from the first of the meetings between the Maurice group and certain Chartist leaders which he had attended. The letter said:

I have just come home from the meeting. No one spoke but working men—gentlemen, I should call them, in every sense of the term. Even I was perfectly astonished by the courtesy, the reverence, to Maurice, who sat there like an Apollo, their eloquence, their brilliant, nervous, well-chosen language, the deep simple earnestness, the rightness and moderation of their thoughts. And these are the *Chartists*, these are the men who are called fools and knaves—who are refused the rights bestowed on every profligate fop.<sup>45</sup>

It was probably shortly after this meeting that to another group of working-class leaders Kingsley dramatically declared, "I am a Church of England parson"—a long pause—"and a Chartist,"<sup>46</sup> for Hughes, who relates the incident, states that it occurred during "the early summer of 1848."

In August Cooper gave three lectures at John Street on the Early English Freethinkers,<sup>47</sup> an anticipation in a humble way of Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Part of his audience thought, he said, that in this series he went too far; the rest thought he did not go far enough. For the first group he professed sympathy and respect; for the second, composed largely of "rash and raw tyros", he felt only contempt. But a distinction should be drawn between beliefs acquired as the result of independent thinking and investigation, and beliefs accepted without any pretence of examination.

<sup>45</sup> Hughes, Thomas, *Prefatory Memoir to Alton Locke* [1876].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> The three lectures dealt with Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Thomas Hobbes, Charles Blount and John Toland [*Reasoner*, Oct. 18 and 25] Shaftesbury, Collins, Woolston, Tindal, Morgan, Chubb and Dr. Conyers Middleton [*Ibid.*, Oct. 25, Nov. 8] and Bolingbroke and Gibbon [*Ibid.*, Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 1848].

It was the latter which he was attacking. Like the early English free-thinkers he wished to address his argument soberly and earnestly to sober and earnest men. Many conscientious persons believed that free-thought would loosen the bonds of moral obligation and pervert character. Such a reason for opposition, though ungrounded, deserved respect. Many religious teachings and practices when coolly examined would be recognized, however, as irrational. Ascetic religion, if allowed to do so, would cover the world with a funeral pall, and shut up the mind in the gloom of the sepulchre. "If Shakespere had 'prayed without ceasing' would we have had Lear and Macbeth and Othello? If Michael Angelo and Christopher Wren had thought of nothing but of being 'not conformed to this world' would we have had the magnificent domes of St. Peter's and St. Paul's?"<sup>48</sup> The miracles related in the Bible Cooper rejected upon three grounds: truth demanded it, for Nature's laws are fixed laws; the advancement of the human mind demanded it, for belief in miracles leads to awe of the priest and hence to fraud and spiritual tyranny; universal happiness demands it, for the happiness of mistaken belief is of little value and requires that man remain in perpetual childhood.

In October 1848 Cooper spoke for the first time at the Hall of Science in City Road [a great stronghold of free thought where he afterwards appeared on numerous occasions], speaking in October upon Burns, Byron, and Shelley, and in December upon Ancient Greece.

At John Street the last month of the year saw a further development of lectures dealing with biblical criticism. His previous lecture on the influence of German thought, philosophy, and criticism, proved so popular that acting under "an evil zeal for what [he] conceived to be the truth."<sup>48a</sup> he commenced a series of eight lectures based entirely upon Strauss: the first four dealing with the birth, childhood, and public life of Jesus, and the second four

<sup>48</sup> *Life*. p. 816.

<sup>48a</sup> *Ibid.*

with his transfiguration, passion, and death. First delivered at John Street<sup>49</sup> these lectures were afterwards repeated at other public halls in London. In response to numerous requests that they be printed, on Christmas Eve, 1848 Cooper promised that he would write out all of the addresses, and then publish them, together with a digest of Strauss's book, in penny numbers. But this scheme was never carried through; and the lectures did not appear in print until a year later, when they formed a feature of *Cooper's Journal*.

Other halls at which Cooper spoke during the autumn of 1848 included the Paddington Literary Institute, Carlisle Street and Edgewater Road, where he lectured during October, November, and December; Whitechapel Hall where he spoke in November and December; and the Marylebone Assembly Rooms, at which he appeared on November 30 and December 14.

At the second annual concert of the Apollonic Society at John Street on Christmas morning, Cooper spoke briefly between the two parts of the program upon the lives and genius of Mozart and Haydn.

Also in December a day school for children at the John Street Institution, was advertised; to be conducted, it was announced, by Mr. Alfred Derviche Brooks under the superintendence of Thomas Cooper.<sup>50</sup> The courses were to be "purely secular", and although the curriculum included geography, history, mathematics, drawing, vocal music, and an introductory course in inductive science, Cooper's former passion, Latin, was omitted. The enterprise seems not to have got beyond the stage of prospectuses; Cooper, for one, being too busy after the beginning of the new year to give it any attention.

<sup>49</sup> The lectures were delivered for the first time on October 29, November 5, 12 and 19, December 24 and 31, 1848, and January 6 and 13, 1849.

<sup>50</sup> *Reasoner*, December 20, 1848.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PLAIN SPEAKER

Benjamin Steill, who in the days of Henry Hunt and the Peterloo massacre had published the government-persecuted *Black Dwarf*, conceived towards the end of 1848 the ambition to establish a new Radical weekly, with Cooper as editor. He submitted his plan to Cooper, who suggested that the periodical be called *The Plain Speaker*,<sup>1</sup> and for a salary of two pounds a week agreed to furnish sufficient material to insure the publication of a four page weekly paper. The first number of the new journal appeared on Saturday, January 20, 1849, and was an immediate success, reaching a sale of nearly 7000 copies.<sup>2</sup>

Cooper wrote the first two issues unassisted, and also the larger part of the succeeding numbers up to the time of his resignation in August. After the third number he had the assistance of T. J. Wooler, formerly editor of the *Black Dwarf*, but as a rule the elderly Wooler confined himself to a few columns of comment upon foreign affairs and radical politics, more or less in the style of the previous generation. While there was never any open disagreement between the coadjutors, neither was there any hearty sympathy or liking.

The publisher, Steill, soon fell into financial difficulties, was unable to secure printing supplies, and several times failed to bring the paper out on time. Cooper contributed a pound a week [half his meager stipend] towards the expenses; but matters did not improve, and finally on September 1 he published a letter in the *Plain Speaker* stating that because of lack of health, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper states that at the time he chose this name he was not aware that Hazlitt had already used it as a book-title. [*Life*, p. 316.]

<sup>2</sup> *Reasoner*, January 31, 1849.

necessity of his delivering lectures out of London, he was relinquishing the conduct of the periodical to Wooler. After Cooper's departure the paper continued for four months before finally giving up the ghost.<sup>3</sup>

After Cooper's resignation Wooler announced that he would continue to carry on the policies of the departing editor, which had been, he said: the establishment of a publication in which the plain truth in plain language would be spoken at all times; the removal of mischievous prejudices which prevented the union of the middle and operative classes; and particularly the excitement of a thirst for education in the youth of the present generation, so that they might be better prepared to discharge the duties of the men of the coming generation.

This last purpose<sup>4</sup> had furnished the inspiration for one of the most popular of all of Cooper's varied compositions; namely, "Eight Letters to Young Men of the Working Classes," which were first published at intervals in the *Plain Speaker* for the purpose of inspiring young artisans to pursue an ambitious course of self-improvement such as the writer himself had followed in his youth. After appearing in the *Plain Speaker* these letters [which W. J. Linton characterized as "of excellent sense, and in plain, earnest, vigorous English reminding one of, and worthy of comparison with, the best writings of Cobbett"] were reprinted as a collection by James Watson,<sup>5</sup> and continued to be popular for many years, the number of copies eventually sold amounting to many thousands of copies.

<sup>3</sup> Wooler and Steill struggled on until the end of the year, the last issue of the *Plain Speaker*, No. 49, appearing on December 22, 1849.

<sup>4</sup> "Through all the vicissitudes of his life Cooper remained true to one thing: the passionate pursuit of knowledge, and the desire to share it with all who were ignorant or depressed. It is due to him, as much as to anybody else, that adult education has flourished in Leicester and Nottingham, and the surrounding districts through bad times and good, from the dark days of the 'forties to the present time."—Peers, Prof. Robert, "Thomas Cooper the Leicester Chartist," *loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> The title page of the copy in the Seligmann collection reads "Eight Letters to the Young Men of the Working Classes—Collected from the 'Plain Speaker'—'Knowledge is Power'—By Thomas Cooper,

Cooper's statement that his resignation as editor of the *Plain Speaker* was prompted in part by his need of rest seems convincing in view of the fact that in addition to writing the largest part of this periodical every week he was at the same time lecturing constantly first in London and later in the North of England, and that he also during this period offered himself as a candidate for Parliament at Leicester, and in addition paid a hasty visit to France.

His enthusiastic belief in "home colonization as a remedy for unemployment" crops out in his feature article for the first number of the *Plain Speaker*. Entitled "The Speech which the Queen *Ought* to Deliver at the Opening of Parliament" this represented Victoria as ordering the crown jewels to be sold for the benefit of a national fund to be used for the purchase of the waste lands of the British Isles. Every acre of uncultivated crown lands she also ordered to be made available. Drastic reductions in the army and navy are also commanded, since war is a satire upon national sanity, as well as upon humanity, religion, and intelligence. She would urge that England set an example to the rest of the world by being the first to commence preparation to abolish war entirely. Reform of the law courts was also necessary; likewise of the national church, particularly in Ireland. She would recommend, too, the erection of model tenements, and that more attention be paid by her officers to caring for the physical condition of her people.

From this article, and other written and spoken utterances during 1849, it is evident that Cooper's opposition to O'Connor's land scheme was due not only to his distrust of O'Connor, but also to his preference for a different plan, derived principally from Louis Blanc. In this same

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Author of 'The Purgatory of Suicides'—London: J. Watson, 3, Queens Head Passage, Paternoster Row, 1851." The first edition must have been published in 1849, however, for in the *Reasoner* of November 28, 1849, announcement was made that "Mr. Thomas Cooper has just published through Mr. Watson, Eight Letters \* \* \*" etc. These letters were included, in slightly revised form, in Cooper's *Thoughts at Fourscore* [1885].

initial number of the *Plain Speaker* he declared editorially that the "great problem" was whether existing inequality, which conferred enjoyment on the few and inflicted misery on the many, could not be gradually abolished, and this he thought "home colonization" would accomplish. He expressed faith also in the remedy of organization of labor, quoting with approval Carlyle's opinion, "This that they call 'organization of labour' is, if well understood, the problem of the whole Future, for all who will in the future pretend to govern men."<sup>6</sup>

The first of the "Letters to the Young Men of the Working Classes" appeared in the second number of the new periodical. He urged his readers not to imitate certain workingmen of Birmingham, for whom some years earlier the public-houses had provided two parlors: one for the humble workman earning but a pound a week with a door labeled simply "Button-Makers;" and another for their exclusive betters who could earn their five pounds weekly labeled "Gentleman-Buttonmakers." In addition to practicing brotherhood and democracy, young men were urged to be charitable, remembering Thom's saying, "But for the poor, the poorer would perish." He advised his readers against early marriage on three grounds: that there were already too many human beings in the world unable to find employment; that money and sense did not come before thirty; and, above all, that years were needed for the cultivation of the mind. Though not himself a teetotaler, he favored total abstinence, but warned against fanaticism on the subject.<sup>7</sup>

During this month of January Cooper completed his series of lectures at John Street on "Myths and Legends of the Four Gospels," and he also delivered four other addresses for the benefit of the Chartist "Victim Fund."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Plain Speaker*, January 27, 1849.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Cooper, who had inaugurated the Victim Fund and was its first Secretary, had been driven out of office at the time of his rupture with O'Connor, but, as these lectures show, he nevertheless continued to work for it.

At the Hall of Science he commenced a new series on Greek History.

Letter 2 "To the Young men of the Working Classes" appeared a fortnight after the first. It stated that the writer was not addressing himself to genius, which would always follow its own path; and declared that resolve, application, energy, and perseverance were the secret of advancement in knowledge. They should never forget that it was to their order that Burns, Jonson and Shakespere belonged—Shakespere, "the woolstapler's and butcher's son;" Ben Jonson, "the bricklayer, the 'learned' Ben Jonson as well as great dramatic poet;" and Burns who "followed his plow in glory and joy along the mountain side."<sup>9</sup> If the worker had no other time for study he was advised to take it from sleep.<sup>10</sup> Advice regarding the study of mathematics and languages, with emphasis upon the importance of Latin, and the recommendation of certain specific texts, completed this installment.

An open letter to Lord Ashley appeared in the *Plain Speaker* of February 17. It began:

If all lords were like you, the miserable condition in which many thousands of working men live would soon be remedied. My order esteem you for your kindness and humanity \* \* \* but the narrowness of your political creed, and the incorrectness of your reasoning on human rights, confirm the conviction [that] the influences of aristocratic station too generally dwarf and distort the judgment.

A far less kindly letter regarding working-class habitations appeared a fortnight later addressed to the Earl of Carlisle.

During February Cooper lectured once at Finsbury Hall, twice at the Hall of Science, and four times at the John Street Institution.

<sup>9</sup> *Plain Speaker*, February 10, 1849.

<sup>10</sup> Opposite this statement some contemporary reader has commented, "For the very best way to lengthen your day is to steal a few hours from night—but it is also, unfortunately, the very best way to shorten your days." It did not appear to shorten those of Cooper, who lived to be 87.

In the third of his letters to the "Men of the Future" the editor dealt with the importance of general reading. He placed Shakespere first in the list of poets, and Milton second; but recommended also Burns and the romantic poets. Novel reading the young man was warned to shun as he would dram-drinking or opium taking, the writer stating that he had known of men to be reduced to sheer imbecility by all three of these corrupting and ruinous habits. He would permit the reading of good prose fiction, but stated that the serious student would spend most of his time and effort reading scientific works, and those which dealt with the laws of the mind. He commended the histories of Grote, Macaulay, and Prescott, but remarked that their high price made them almost inaccessible to working men.<sup>11</sup>

"Home colonization" Cooper wrote in March "To workingmen in manufacturing districts", "is the great effectual remedy for your distressed condition, as well as for the wretchedness of many of the agricultural labourers."

We have long been asked what we would do with the Charter if we had it. Let the "settlement of the unemployed upon the waste-lands" be the first answer. \* \* \* I was for a long time loath to come to this conclusion. I was unwilling to attach any proposition to the Charter in any shape, believing that we ought to regard the simple acquiescence in Manhood Suffrage and its other provisions as sufficient. But I now see the absolute necessity of something more as a guarantee that you should not be mocked by being left to starve, even if the most ultra democratic changes in government were brought about.<sup>12</sup>

A series of half a dozen open letters addressed to the Bishop of Exeter were begun about this time. This ecclesiastic, who had prosecuted James Shore for carrying on unauthorized services, was addressed as "Lord Harry" and attacked with savage abuse and bitter sarcasm. A com-

<sup>11</sup> *Plain Speaker*, March 10, 1849. To meet this situation Watson established this year a small lending library, which included among other things the first work published by "The Smithsonian Institute in America."

<sup>12</sup> *Plain Speaker*, March 10, 1849.

munication addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the same matter began:

One would think your name was somnolent, or sleepy-head, instead of Sumner, seeing you are so very quiet while your church is filling England with alarms, hundreds of the clergy of your establishment leaving it for Romanism, hundreds more espousing what is called "Puseyism," a sort of half-way doctrine between your church and the Romish \* \* \* and now another writing a book "The Nemesis of Faith" which has been burnt at Oxford, and on which opinion seems divided as to whether it is to be regarded as written to support infidelity or blind faith—free thought or immortality.<sup>1</sup>

On March 22-23 Cooper paid a lecturing visit to Birmingham, stopping off at Leicester and Loughborough. From the latter place he set off on foot to visit the neighboring monastery of St. Bernard, which he had previously visited during his tour for Jerrold in 1846. On two hundred and twenty-five acres of barren and rocky ground, by the labor of forty monks this religious community developed sufficient in crops and domestic animals to feed not only themselves but also to relieve with food in 1847, a year of unusual distress, 36,000 persons; and in 1848, when conditions improved slightly, to feed 32,000 persons. In addition to this they had supplied occasional lodging to 12,000 in 1847 and to 7,000 in the year following. Little as he sympathized with their religion and discipline, Cooper could not refrain from exclaiming, "What forty men in England are doing so much good *physically* to their distressed fellow-creatures as these poor monks?" The guest-master told Cooper that their success was due to their religious principles, remarking, "There is Mr. Owen, for instance; he has tried, but he has failed. I think it was religion that was wanting in his undertakings; although he is a most benevolent man, and has spent an enormous property on his scheme." Cooper felt, however, that "home colonies," with schools, libraries, lectures, music, conversation, rational amusements, and plenty of good food and clothing could also be successful, and that

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

the twenty-two millions of acres of waste lands in the British Isles \* \* \* untouched save for aristocratic sports of shooting wild birds and hunting wild beasts, is only to be accounted for on very evil and very mistaken principles. \* \* \* Why the Guardians of the Poor should not colonize these wastes I cannot see. \* \* \* "If I were Poor Law Commissioner," said strong-minded Thomas Carlyle in my hearing one day, "I would see if I could not find something better for poor men to do than breaking stones." \* \* \* We should find our way out of the mist which thickens every day if men with brains in their skulls were made rulers.<sup>14</sup>

Eight years before the Indian Mutiny the *Plain Speaker* warned against the military mania prevailing in the East, which "had stimulated the thirst for conquest to such voracity," wrote Wooler, "that a Sunday journal has already seen [in a vision we suppose] the British Empire extended over the whole of India, and including, of course, that mere strip of a highway to our Indian capitals called Egypt."<sup>15</sup> A quarter of a century later Disraeli brought the latter part of this vision to reality.

Cooper's fourth letter to young working men appeared on March 31. In it, as in many of his other pieces, the writer continually introduced references to his own past experiences, producing an impression of self-conceit which, according to the reader's attitude towards the author, is either pardonable or offensive. In this letter he recommended preserving notes on one's reading, and counseled the perusal and composition of essays for the improvement of one's vocabulary and powers of composition. No other leader among the working class attached the same importance to the education of the masses.

A subject on which I feel increasing anxiety [he wrote, is] the formation of a large and effective band of public speakers and teachers for my own order. At present books are doing all, or nearly all, that is effectually done for us. The speakers who, for some years past, have been most cordially received by working men, were unable to help forward the great work of intellectual regeneration and advancement. They possessed no store of reading: they were not men of cultivated minds. Oppression had girt them up to political antagonism; and they went forth to rouse their or-

<sup>14</sup> *Plain Speaker*, March 24, 1849.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

der, and to speak out its mind against class tyranny. Their history will make an important chapter one day in the political and social chronicle of Britain; but this will only be when Time has taught the thinker to excuse their errors, from a consideration of their wrongs, and their deep sense of them.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Peers, after quoting the above passage, rightly observes:

Men like Cooper provided the link between the idealism of Robert Owen and the age when it would begin to be realized in practical results. Who can tell into what depths of apathy and degradation, but for them, the working class of this country might have been plunged during the blackest days of its history? These men—Place, Lovett, Cooper \* \* \* made themselves into teachers at a cost which can scarcely be computed in these days when adult education has won for itself, largely because of their efforts, a sure place in the educational system of the country.<sup>17</sup>

Stagecoaches had not yet entirely disappeared in 1849, and in March Cooper went by coach from London to Banbury by way of Oxford. Having to wait three hours in the university city, he visited the Bodleian library and some of the colleges.<sup>18</sup> After opening a "People's Lecture Room" in Banbury, Cooper proceeded next day by coach to Leamington, and from thence to Birmingham by train for two nights of lecturing. His next stop was Manchester, where his address of March 31, in a hall crowded to the rafters, was an appeal to young men to strive for mental culture in preparation for future leadership. The promotion of this cause he now held to be his greatest work. After speaking during the following week at Bolton, Manchester, and Padiham, he returned to London to speak on Sunday at the Hall of Science, following which he again set off for Lancashire.

During April he published in the *Plain Speaker* an article attacking the principle of *laissez-faire* and support-

<sup>16</sup> *Plain Speaker*, March 31, 1849.

<sup>17</sup> "Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist," *loc. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Kingsley, after representing Alton Locke [chapter xiii] as making some exceedingly strong remarks upon the favoritism and exclusiveness of the universities, added in a footnote, "It must be remembered that these impressions of, and comments on, the universities are not my own. They are simply what clever workmen thought about them from 1845 to 1850." They certainly express the sentiments of Cooper.

ing the position that a government ought "to procure wealth and comfort for a people directly." The proper kind of government, he felt, should make provision for the education of the people, the proper cultivation of the land, encouragement of art, science, and literature, and feeding and housing the poor and helpless. Chartist, he said, should lay stress on such positive duties of the government and not on its negative aspects only.<sup>19</sup>

The workers of Manchester, he reported after his visit to that city, believed the existing state of society to be unjust and cruel, since it disabled the millions from sharing the benefits of science by allowing the wealthy to seize the advantages of improvements. "A settled sourness, a fixed sense of wrong, and, in general, of hostility to manufacturing employers," he wrote, "pervades the working classes, not only in Manchester, but all of Lancashire."<sup>20</sup> He reported at some length the boasted glories of Manchester, but he also saw the obverse of the picture, as Macaulay apparently never did. The 80,000 Irish of Manchester, he stated, were living in dingy narrow alleys, where the air was infected by decaying vegetable matter, ashes, and "nuisance heaps," amidst which crowds of unwashed, unkempt, and half-naked children crept and tumbled about when the weather permitted them to quit the miserable sheds adjoining. "Who can restrain a complaint against our civilization," he exclaimed, "when these sights are beheld in one street, and immense warehouses, stately dwellings, and gaily dressed merchants' ladies in another?"<sup>21</sup>

Cooper spoke on the topic of self-education in Leeds on Monday, April 16, and on the same subject for the two days following in Sheffield. In this city a Dissenting minister named Bailey had established a "People's College" [apparently the first experiment of this kind in England] which Cooper described in some detail in the *Plain Speaker*

<sup>19</sup> *Plain Speaker*, April 14, 1849.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

of April 28. He at one time corresponded with Mr. Bailey regarding a similar institution for London, but illness prevented his going on with the plan. After describing labor conditions in Sheffield, he noted that some of the working-men associations had banded together to purchase land, which was being cultivated cooperatively. Shakespere's birthday, the date on which he was writing, should be felt, be agitated for by the workers as a national holiday, as the great poet was indubitably a member of their order.

Since the intelligence of the operative had to be united with the capital of the manufacturer to direct and superintend the machines which were producing wealth, he wrote in May, the workers had a claim to a much greater share in that augmented wealth than was represented by their wages. "Your working people," he wrote in an open letter to James Garth Marshall, wealthy manufacturer and M. P. for Leeds, "will never suppose that they have each a claim to so large a share as you \* \* \* but they say it cannot be right that *one* intelligence in you should enjoy all the comforts and luxuries of life, and *two thousand* intelligences, albeit of an inferior grade if you will have it so, should only achieve straitness of living, unhealthy habitations, difficulty in sickness, and the union workhouse in old age."<sup>22</sup>

The older cloth manufacturers of Leeds, whose expensive fine broadcloth was being driven out of the market by the cheaper "cotton-woolens" [i. e. shoddy] of Bradford, Huddersfield, and Halifax, had been accustomed to pension off their superannuated hands with ten shillings a week. Within a year of the elder Mr. Gott's death, his sons having stopped this bounty, seven of the old workmen discharged without pension committed suicide.

Following his final lecture at Leeds, on Tuesday, April 24th, Cooper departed for York, where he spoke for two nights. He took time to visit the cathedral, which he praised enthusiastically. From York he proceeded to Newcastle, which he made his headquarters for the next

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<sup>22</sup> *Plain Speaker*, May 5, 1849.

fortnight. Besides speaking there six times to the largest audiences he had yet had, he went out to the adjoining communities of Shields, Sunderland and Winlaton.

At the Stephenson steam-engine works in Newcastle he found that as much work was then being done in four days as it had taken seven to accomplish only four years earlier. "The workmen conclude," Cooper reported, "that as they are not benefited by this, but injured, the *system* is wrong; for they are not so unreasoning as to confound *that* with the employer when his character merits respect." The stained-glass works in Newcastle also interested Cooper greatly, and he declared that if he had a couple of millions a year he would, after educating every working man's child, restore all the stained-glass windows in every cathedral in England.

Leaving Newcastle on Monday, May 14, Cooper went on to Carlisle, which he reminded his writers was reputed to be the place where Adam Bell and Clim O'Clough had met. The portion of the old cathedral which had been repaired since his previous visit in 1846 he thought so ugly as to deserve being broken to pieces mercilessly. The hand-loom weavers, who had to work in unpaved rooms below the level of the street to secure the dampness necessary for weaving, he found to be in even worse circumstances than during this previous stay in the town, their average earnings amounting to but 6s. 6d. per week.<sup>23</sup> Mechanics Institutes, which barred discussion of religious and political questions and closed their libraries on Sunday, were not, he thought, meeting the need for inexpensive centers where young men could read and study, and he declared his intention of organizing shortly his own "general union for intelligence and enfranchisement" which would be directed by "a band of hearty and intelligent teachers who should perambulate from one part of the country to another."

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<sup>23</sup> *Plain Speaker*, May 26, 1847.

In Liverpool, which he visited on May 16 and 17, he found few who were interested in his new plans. His article in this city describes the political subserviency of its shipwrights, the miserable cellar-dwellings of its Irish, and the vice, wretchedness, and dissipation of its great seaport; evils in sharp contrast to the conditions found in Birkenhead, just across the Mersey.

Cooper was summoned back to London on May 18 because of the illness of the person he had left in charge of the *Plain Speaker*.

The Marquis of Granby's motion that the House be adjourned over the "national fete—Derby Day" aroused Cooper's wrath.

It is a "national fete" for sucking marquises and lords \* \* \* while millions toil and starve. Ay, ay, sport away young fellow! the time is coming when you will have serious games to attend to. Think of putting the battlements of Belvoir in good repair, for you are going to bring about scenes in England that have not been witnessed these two hundred years.<sup>24</sup>

In this same issue of June 2, 1849, Cooper discussed for his workmen readers the liberal movement in France, Hungary, and Italy, the annexation of the Punjab, and the troubles in Ireland and Canada, and gave it as his opinion that the governing class would shortly bring about "a good-red-hot war" as a remedy for the smoldering discontent everywhere; but he believed that what Pitt had wickedly adopted as an extinguisher for liberty would in the nineteenth century tend to hasten the triumph of the people, and the humiliation of the aristocracy.

At the end of May, W. E. Forster, a consistently generous friend, asked for Cooper's company during a brief visit to France, and offered to pay all his expenses. His impressions of the only foreign country he ever visited Cooper wrote out for the *Plain Speaker* in four installments, entitled "Five Days in Paris" and "a Sunday at Calais."<sup>25</sup> He was greatly impressed by the convenience of everything in France, particularly of the furniture,

<sup>24</sup> *Plain Speaker*, June 2, 1849.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, June 9, 16, 23 and 30, 1849.

"so utterly unlike the clumsy masses of mahogany with their black horse-hair seatings so common in London." "Out of doors," he added, "*some conveniences* are as badly provided for as in London; but you cannot fail to note their attention to others." "Next to the Louvre," he remarked, "the old cathedral at St. Denis \* \* \* was to me, who have a real passion for an old cathedral, the most precious sight I had in France." Paris he pronounced to be "the gayest and most refined city in the world." In one of the parks he introduced himself to two young French workmen, with whom he held an animated conversation on the Socialism of Robert Owen. Finally he expressed a wish that the English would learn from the French how to make a good cup of coffee.<sup>26</sup> Leaving Paris on Saturday night he arrived in Calais at three on Sunday morning, hoping to cross the Channel early, and so to reach London in time for his lecture that night at John Street, but found that there would be no boat until eight in the evening. Part of the morning he spent in attending the service at the Catholic cathedral, where he counted fifty men among upwards of a thousand women.

Returning to the John Street platform on June 17 Cooper delivered, commencing with that date, three successive lectures on political conditions in Russia, in Hungary and Austria, and in Prussia and Germany.

Kingsley was in London at this time "attending a Chartist meeting on the 3rd of June, and on the 19th a workmen's meeting on the Land Colonization question."<sup>27</sup> He was evidently in touch with Cooper, for he wrote his wife that his *Village Sermons* "were being lent from man to man among the South London Chartists at such a pace that Cooper can't get them back again. And the Manchester men stole his copy of the *Saint's Tragedy*."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The following week a correspondent wrote Cooper that the secret of good coffee was to use a percolator, which the writer described in detail, and urged that some tinman put upon the market.

<sup>27</sup> *Letters and Memories* [abridged edn.] p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Cooper's letter of June 16 "To the young men of the working classes" broached a new subject—the vital importance of their launching a drive for individual petitions in favor of the Charter. The writer, who a short time before had described himself as "a Chartist, though not a member of any Chartist association,"<sup>29</sup> urged this new kind of tactics on the ground that after the fiasco of the previous year monster petitions could never possibly succeed again. The extravagant expectations of what manhood suffrage would accomplish are illustrated in the closing sentences of his appeal—"This establishment of Man's dignity universally alone can make the world happy, can cast down its oppressions, and lay the foundations for universal justice, universal peace, and universal brotherhood." Although Cooper advocated his new scheme with all the powers at his command it perished stillborn.

With regard to union between the workers and the middle class, Cooper's convictions had now completely changed. Unwilling himself to accept anything short of full manhood suffrage, he could nevertheless now write, "If a powerful section of the present electors can be brought to unite for the enfranchisement of three and a half millions—and will join with their demand the abolition of Property Qualification—I wish them success."<sup>30</sup>

In his final letter to young working-men Cooper advised them that if they wished to know all the richness of their native language they must venture into fields of literature which were neither popular nor utilitarian. For majesty and beauty of style he commended the works of Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, and the prose of Milton. Of the writers of his own day he felt that only two could be placed in the highest class—Carlyle and Landor.

<sup>29</sup> This was on the occasion of his addressing a public meeting called by the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, which Sir Joshua Walmsley, M. P., was chairman.

<sup>30</sup> *Plain Speaker*, June 2, 1849.

Two "Revelations of a Clairvoyant" signed by Repoo Samoht [the editor's name spelled backwards] appeared in the *Plain Speaker* during July. These represented conversations, "overheard in the electric spirit," between Louis Napoleon and the Duke of Lichtenburg, and between Disraeli and Herries. Both were savage caricatures of men whose political opinions Cooper heartily abhorred. The form was suggested by the revelations of a contemporary charlatan who called himself "Davis the Poughkeepsie Seer."

The final number for this month of July contained also a long article on "Cultivation of Waste Lands by the Unemployed;" and the second issue for August an article on Socialism which stated:

Communism is growing. It is neither dead nor dying, but is taking hold of the minds of men in every walk of life. It cannot fail to do so. The world is wrong. Men see it, and are driven to reflect upon remedies."

The third week of August marked Cooper's last appearance in the *Plain Speaker* save for his brief letter of resignation published September 1.

At the beginning of June Cooper had received a request from a number of Leicester electors, chiefly workingmen, that he become a candidate for M. P. from Leicester at the next election, whenever it should occur. In announcing his acceptance Cooper stated his platform would be: The Charter; separation of church and state; substitution of arbitration for war; Free Trade; home colonization; and "the intellectual advancement of the people by the establishment of schools and lending libraries."<sup>31</sup> On June 18 he went to Leicester to meet his supporters, and on June 27 he addressed a long letter to them through the medium of the *Plain Speaker*. Appealing to the liberals of the middle class he declared:

Experience and reflection produce healthy changes in a man; and I avow at once that the course I pursued while an inhabitant of your town I am incapable of now, and could not repeat in many

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<sup>31</sup> *Plain Speaker*, August 11, 1849.

<sup>32</sup> *Plain Speaker*, June 9, 1849.

of its injudicious details. It was an earnest chivalry in the cause of the oppressed, but like the chivalry of the Middle Ages was mixed with much that after enlightenment must condemn.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly afterwards he withdrew his candidature, however, finding that the expense of campaigning was such as no poor man unsupported by local institutions could afford.

At the beginning of July Cooper paid lecturing visits to Coventry, Cheltenham, and Northampton,<sup>34</sup> still endeavoring to arouse young men to "read and reflect." It was the fatigue of these journeys, and the difficulty of supervising the *Plain Speaker* during his absences from London which in part prompted his resignation the following month.

Upon the death of Henry Hetherington in August Cooper delivered a "funeral elogé" on the character of this champion of an unstamped press and pioneer of Chartism at the John Street Institution, which was so well received that, after being printed in full in the *Reasoner* of the following week,<sup>35</sup> it was included in slightly abbreviated form in a pamphlet published by Watson for the benefit of Hetherington's family.<sup>36</sup> The full lecture brings out more plainly than the pamphlet how far Cooper was even at this time from the uncompromising free-thinkers from whom he was to part company a few years later. In his "Last Will and Testament" Hetherington had avowed his disbelief in the existence of any almighty, all-wise, and benevolent God, and his conviction that death was an eternal sleep. Concerning these two statements Cooper said:

I am not able to speak with such positiveness relative to the non-existence of a Deity, or of a Future State \* \* \* I am fully aware of the want of direct evidence; but there are some considera-

<sup>33</sup> *Plain Speaker*, June 30, 1849.

<sup>34</sup> For an account of Cooper's impressions of these towns see *Plain Speaker*, August 18, 1849.

<sup>35</sup> *Reasoner*, September 5, 1849.

<sup>36</sup> The title of this 2d. pamphlet is "The Life and Character of Henry Hetherington from the Elogé by T. Cooper \* \* \*; the Oration at Kensal Green Cemetery by G. J. Holyoake \* \* \*; the Speech of James Watson; a Tribute by W. J. Linton: with Hetherington's Last Will and Testament" London, 1849, 16 pp.

tions—wishes and longings perhaps they may be called—which render me unable or unwilling to give up these doctrines. Yet, I repeat, I honour Henry Hetherington for his courageous honesty in making these confessions, both in life and in death.

From July 8th until the end of the year Cooper spoke on alternate Sundays at John Street and the Hall of Science. Some of his subjects were: the Age of Chivalry; Raleigh and the Age of Elizabeth; the Reign of Queen Anne; and the Administration of Pitt. He lectured also during these months on the “life<sup>37</sup> and genius” of Rousseau, Voltaire, Sir William Jones, Sir Isaac Newton, Shakespere, Milton, Shelley, Byron, and Burns, and also on *Gulliver’s Travels* and Godwin’s *Political Justice*.

His lecture criticizing “The Doctrine of Robert Owen” was printed in full from his own notes in the *Reasoner* of October 24. He there stated that although he had always accepted Owen’s fundamental dogma that man is completely the creature of circumstances existing before and after his birth, he was not prepared to accept Owen’s conclusion from these premises that men were entitled neither to praise nor blame, merit nor demerit. Such a position, Cooper felt, was a complete denial of all morality. Holyoake, who had begun his career as a Socialist lecturer, explained that as respected the *origin* of a man’s action, the Socialists neither praised nor blamed, but with regard to the *effects* of his conduct and of his opinions on society, they distinguished actions into useful and pernicious, and opinions into true and false. Wrong acts and wrong opinions met with disapprobation, not as punishment, but so that the erring might get right and the bad amend.<sup>38</sup>

When a friend signified his intention towards the end of this year of calling upon Ebenezer Elliott, Cooper asked him to present a copy of the *Purgatory of Suicides* to the

<sup>37</sup> “When treating poetry,” he wrote to “Men of the Future” [Letter 5] “it is better to treat the *Life* of the poet as the basis of the theme. All great poets whose lives we know anything about had deeply eventful lives. They were all great wrestlers with men and things.”

<sup>38</sup> *Reasoner*, November 7, 1849.

Corn Law Rhymer, with a request that its author be permitted to call. The following note resulted:

Hargate Hill, near Barnsley,  
9th September, 1849.

Dear Mr. Cooper:

Stone deaf as I am at present, and agonized with unintermitting pain, I could not welcome a visit from Dante himself, even if he brought with him a sample of the best brimstone-pudding which may be prepared for me in the low country. But if I should recover, and you then happen to be in my neighborhood, you will need no introduction but your name; and I will promise you a hearty welcome, bacon and eggs, and a bed.

I am, dear sir,

Yours very truly,

Ebenezer Elliott<sup>39</sup>

Elliott's death on December 1, 1849,<sup>40</sup> prevented the meeting from taking place.

A wealthy sympathizer with free thought and working-class education named C. J. Jenkins, upon his death in November of this year, bequeathed a legacy estimated at ten thousand pounds for the establishment and endowment of an "Institution for the Working Classes," and named Thomas Cooper as one of the committee in charge of the expenditure of the bequest.<sup>41</sup> The proposed Institute was never inaugurated, however, as the will was contested, and after two years of litigation finally set aside.<sup>42</sup>

Kingsley was in regular correspondence with Cooper at this time, but not many of the letters which passed between them have been published. One from Kingsley dated December 6, 1842, announced the writer's unfavorable opinion of Cobden's suggestion that free-traders qualify as county voters by purchasing freehold property worth forty shillings a year. Kingsley feared the evil conse-

<sup>39</sup> *Life*, pp. 319-320. This letter was first published in *Cooper's Journal* of June 8, 1850, in connection with Richard Otley's reminiscences of Elliott.

<sup>40</sup> *The Plain Speaker*, December 15, 1849, contained an obituary.

<sup>41</sup> *Reasoner*, December 5, 1849.

<sup>42</sup> *Reasoner*, March 5, 1851.

quences of absentee ownership if this plan were carried out, as he believed many such freeholds would be taken up by small retail tradesmen—"a class," he wrote Cooper, "which you and I know are a curse to the workman."<sup>4</sup>

Before the end of the year Cooper had been persuaded to commence a new weekly penny periodical, to be published by his friend James Watson; and *Cooper's Journal*, the last of his ventures of this kind, was initiated on January 5, 1850. The story of that periodical will be found in the following chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> *Letters and Memories*, 1: 149. This letter is omitted from some of the later editions of the Kingsley biography.

## CHAPTER XXV

### COOPER'S JOURNAL AND CAPTAIN COBLER

The rise and decline of *Cooper's Journal* almost exactly parallels that of its predecessor, the *Plain Speaker*. Both were primarily journals of protest, and like many such publications before and since, the beginning numbers were in brisk demand. But while there are always many readers who enjoy attacks upon existing institutions, once the novelty of such assaults has worn off, and the public has learned what to expect, interest is apt to flag. This may have been one reason for the falling off in circulation of Cooper's publications after the first few months of their existence. Another reason why neither of Cooper's ventures lasted much longer than half a year was that his practice of setting off at the beginning of each spring for a lecture tour of the Midlands, Lancashire, and Yorkshire made it impossible for him to conduct a weekly published in London during the weeks he was out of the city, and resulted in his retirement from the *Plain Speaker* at the end of August, after having contributed little or nothing to it for several weeks previously, and in the temporary suspension of *Cooper's Journal* at the end of June, after he had again allowed his own contributions to dwindle away steadily as summer approached.

"*Cooper's Journal: or, Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom and Progress,*" to give it its full title, was a penny weekly of about sixteen pages each number, the pages being about one third of the size of those of the larger four-page *Plain Speaker*.

The initial number appeared on January 5, 1850, the first Saturday of the new year; and thereafter the periodical was issued regularly for twenty-six weeks, i. e. until June 29, 1850. It then suspended publication for three months, commencing again on October 5, and finally con-

cluding on the 26th of the same month. Of the first number 5000 copies were sold, and this figure was subsequently increased to 9000 by the sale of back issues. The second and third numbers did almost as well, but after the first month a steady decline in circulation set in, until by the end of June, when the paper was temporarily discontinued, the number sold weekly was but 3,600. Upon renewal of publication in October that circulation did not rise above 2000 copies, and at the end of that month Cooper announced that as he had no money to lose, and as a circulation of 2000 [which produced not much more than eight pounds] did not pay expenses, he was forced to discontinue. He himself attributed the failure to the lack of support for a periodical which spoke out, and this was undoubtedly a potent contributing factor. His anti-sabatarianism, his support of Chartism, national education, and "home colonization," and his attacks upon the clergy, and upon the Gospels as unscientific legends, did doubtless shock many middle-class Victorians, and lead to his paper's being looked upon as a dangerous and subversive influence. Even those who sympathized with his political and social program could be shocked by his frank and honest criticism of the New Testament records. We find Charles Kingsley, for instance, writing to Ludlow:

But there is something which weighs awfully on my mind--the first number of *Cooper's Journal*, which he sent me the other day. Here is a man of immense influence opening preaching Straussism to the workmen, and in a fair, honest, manly way which must tell. Who will answer him? Who will answer Strauss? Who will denounce Strauss as a vile aristocrat, robbing the poor man of his Saviour--of the ground of all democracy, all freedom, all association--of the Charter itself?<sup>1</sup>

To Cooper himself Kingsley wrote on February 15, 1850:

Many thanks for your paper. On theological points I will say

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Memories* [Abridged edn.] p. 128. Thomas Hughes, who quoted this letter in his "Prefatory Memoir" [misdating it 1849] states in a footnote: "He [Kingsley] did the work himself. After many interviews and a long correspondence with him, Thomas Cooper changed his views, and has been lecturing and preaching for many years as a Christian." As I show elsewhere, Cooper categorically denied being converted by Kingsley.

nothing. We must have a good stand-up fight some day, when we have wind and time. In the meantime I will just say that I believe as devoutly as you, Goethe, or Strauss, that God never does—if one dare use the word, never *can*—break the Laws of Nature, which are His Laws \* \* \* but that Christ's Miracles seem to me the highest realization of those very laws. How? you will ask—to which I answer, you must let me tell you by and by \* \* \* 'The days are evil, and we must redeem the time,'—our one chance for all the Eternities to do a little work for God and the people, for whom I believe he gave His well-beloved Son. That is the spring of my work, Thomas Cooper; it will be yours; consciously or unconsciously it is now, for aught I know, if you be the man I take you for.<sup>2</sup>

The articles thus denounced—but not answered—were based on the eight discourses which Cooper had delivered at the John Street Institution during the previous winter, and which he was this year repeating at the Hall of Science. They contain very little which is not today widely known, and in liberal Protestant circles generally accepted; and they demonstrate very clearly that the controversy between Modernist and Fundamentalist is not peculiar to America or to the twentieth century. After his second conversion Cooper himself wrote a brief treatise on the *Value and Verity of the Miracles of Christ*, but in that work he by no means answers the questions or overthrows the principal points made in his "Critical Exegesis of Gospel History, based on Strauss' *Leben Jesu*," of twenty-six years earlier. In this work of his old age he accepts the miracles as having happened exactly as they are recorded by the evangelists, just as he accepts the whole of the redemption scheme. This allows him to account for the miracles as deliberate suspensions of natural law by an omnipotent God for the purpose of proving Christ's identity, first to himself, and afterwards to others. Yet in the concluding chapter of this record of faith Cooper honestly admits:

What are called the Evidences of Christianity will seldom suffice to win a man to faith who has no wish to believe. Common as it is for writers on the Evidences to assert that it needs

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<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Memories* 1:325-6.

but the employment of the ordinary powers of understanding for men to become convinced of the Truth of Christianity, I believe that this is not true. A man may exercise much more than ordinary powers of understanding and consideration upon the very clearest array of "Evidences" and yet be unconvinced. \* \* \* I find that I must receive many things for solid truth which I cannot reason out logically. I dare not pass judgment on other men. They are answerable to their Maker, only. I cannot live in a world of cold negations. It is a wonder to me that other men can live in such a world. But I do not condemn them for it.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of this inability to "live in a world of cold negations", and an unmistakably prophecy of his speedy arrival at faith because of a never absent wish to believe, are plainly present in the paragraph which prefaces the very first installment of the 1850 agnostic articles:

All who are afraid of thinking, and who dread that the People should think, on the most important of all subjects, will censure me for the publication of these discourses. I yield to none in fervent admiration and love for the character of Christ. Under all changes of opinion, his moral beauty has ever kept its throne in my heart and mind, as the most worshipful of all portraiture of goodness. I seek to multiply, not to lessen the number of his true disciples. Deeply convinced that the rapid growth of enquiry, and the spread of scientific information, among the great body of the People, are destroying all belief in what is evidently legendary, I am anxious to aid the preservation, in some minds at least, of continued and purified attachment to the substance of Christianity, while its shadows are being dispelled. I know no higher teaching than Christ's: I acknowledge none. But his religion no longer commends itself to me by mysterious or miraculous sanctions. I hold it to be the most perfect version of the Religion of Humanity; and for that reason desire to see it divested of all legendary incrustations that may prevent its reception with sincere and earnest thinkers. The great work of Strauss assisted me much in coming to a clear and determinate conclusion respecting the source of the corruptions in the real history of Christ; and with a view to help others who might experience similar difficulties to mine, I delivered these discourses.<sup>4</sup>

Some installment of the "Critical Exegesis" appeared in every one of the thirty numbers of *Cooper's Journal*.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Verity and Value of the Miracles of Christ, an appeal to the common sense of the people* [8th thousand], London, 1887, pp. 169-170.

<sup>4</sup> *Cooper's Journal*, January 5, 1850.

The thesis of the series, which was primarily a mere restatement of Strauss's work, is that the New Testament accounts of the miracles, and also of Christ's birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, passion, resurrection, and ascension are merely popular legends of writers who frequently contradict each other, and about whom little is certainly known. Only seven of the lectures were published, but as the eighth merely presented Cooper's own ideas regarding the character of Christ, without reference to Strauss, it was not properly a part of the "Critical Exegesis."

For the *Journal*, Cooper also wrote out three of his orations [those on the Life and Genius of Sir Isaac Newton, the Age of Chivalry, and Moral and Political Lessons of *Gulliver's Travels*]; all interesting examples of a type of lecture which attracted hundreds of intelligent artisans and middle class people during the 1850's.

Three abusive and satirical letters to the Bishop of Exeter, and three others to various lords temporal, were also numbered among the editor's contributions. Of his other regular contributions those relating his reminiscences of Wordsworth, expressing his approval of the short-lived cooperative workshops founded by the Christian Socialists, and testifying to the value of mesmerism for the relief of the incurable invalidism of his wife are perhaps the most interesting.

He was induced to try the effect of mesmerism upon Mrs. Cooper by the recommendation of his medical friends Doctors Eliotson and Ashburner, and has thus described the result:

By means of slow passes with the open hand—at first from the top of the forehead to the throat, but at length to the feet, the patient, if I am well, and my nerves at ease, falls into refreshing slumber; but if I am under nervous irritability, or in ill health, the sleep is only imperfect—that is to say, the patient does not

become unconscious. \* \* \* Whenever the mesmerism is unavoidably neglected, pain and weakness return—which no medicine ever yet prescribed for her can do more than imperfectly relieve.<sup>5</sup>

Cooper also wrote for his *Journal* four letters of a second series "To the Young Men of the Working Classes," these letters forming the opening article of the first number for each month. Letter I repeated his former suggestion that all workingmen's organizations unite to form a National Progress Union. While he received many communications approving the scheme, and an attempt was made at Manchester to put it into operation, the plan was too vague in outline, and too little the spontaneous desire of the associations themselves, to be successful. Letter II repeated the appeal for individual petitions to Parliament in support of the Charter, but was like the previous summons fruitless of result. Letter III gave some hints as to subject matter and style of prose compositions suitable for working class periodicals, and it was urged that the number of such publications be increased. Letter IV discussed the question, "What is the best standard and school of poetry?" Cooper's conclusion was that no school should be set up as supreme, and that a catholic or universal taste in poetry was the only creditable taste. In this letter he also analyzed the poetry of Pope at some length, commanding it for many and great excellencies, though he thought it could not be numbered in the very first rank of poetry. He especially recommended this poet to young versifiers, declaring that if one could not learn the mechanics of poetry from Pope he could learn them nowhere. This was announced as the first of a series of articles on the schools of poetry, but the others were never written.

The writer who, next to Cooper, contributed the largest number of prose articles to the *Journal* was Frank Grant. The son of a clergyman, he was confined to his couch by paralysis, from which he contributed frequently to free thought publications. The principal contributor of poetry to *Cooper's Journal* was Gerald Massey, who is said

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<sup>5</sup> *Cooper's Journal*, January 26, 1850.

to have been the original of *Felix Holt the Radical*.<sup>6</sup> Born in 1828, Massey survived until 1907. He published his first book of verse in 1851. Fourteen of his poems appeared for the first time on the poetry page of *Cooper's Journal*. W. Moy Thomas, afterwards editor of *Cassell's Magazine*, also contributed verse to Cooper's periodical; as did the editor himself on two occasions. William Jones, one of the collaborators in the *Chartist Hymn Book*, also contributed frequently, many of his poems, which usually dealt with the beauties of nature, being really excellent.

A page of selections from the writings of such men as Landor, Dr. Johnson, Carlyle, Emerson, Shelley, Bentham, Addison, and William Godwin also appeared every week, under the jejune heading "Thinkings." Reviews, usually very brief, and of no critical value, likewise appeared frequently. They usually dealt with volumes of poetry by working class authors, or with books and pamphlets bearing on social problems. By no means the least interesting part of the magazine was Cooper's "Answers to Correspondents." To one who had submitted a copy of verses he wrote: "There is a touch of the real spirit of Burns about them—but the subject!—fie upon it! it would not do to print anything so naughty."

He found it necessary to deny repeatedly at this time that he was the author of "The Infidel's Text-Book," which was the work of Robert Cooper, an atheist of the Bradlaugh type, who was not related to him.

The return of better times with the beginning of the new decade was doubtless another reason for the non-success of Cooper's Journal. With the return of prosperity the workers lost much of their former interest in radical publications. As early as March of this year Cooper was writing to a correspondent, "So long as abundance of employment continues workingmen *cannot* be roused to effort. And who can wonder at it who remembers their long and severe deprivations, and the influences with

<sup>6</sup> Walker, H., *Literature of the Victorian Era*, p. 447.

which they are surrounded?" In the final issue of his weekly in October he stated: "I have said little of the condition of working-men in these hasty notes. To my unspeakable gratification I found a great decrease of suffering in every district I visited: the reports of abundant employment being nearly general."

Although it must be confessed that Cooper's little periodical was not a particularly brilliant or important publication, the articles by the editor were uniformly more original, more forceful, and more interesting than those of his handful of contributors. When it is remembered that these articles were written, and the paper gotten together and issued, in the intervals of a busy life as a lecturer, the wonder is, not that the weekly was sometimes feeble, but that it was so often good. There can be no question either as to the value of *Cooper's Journal*, and of his previous publications also, as an educational force amongst his readers. Cooper's periodicals were cheap enough to be within the reach of all, and, as we have shown, their contents included history, English literature, economics, political theory, and a large amount of poetry. New and wider horizons stretching beyond their immediate limited experience were thus disclosed to the workers. At the same time, through Cooper's continual references to the popular struggles of history they received a sense of continuity with the past, while the discussion of foreign efforts to attain freedom created a fraternal feeling for the working classes of other countries.

Shortly after the suspension of his last periodical, a spirited exchange of opinion took place between Cooper and Holyoake with regard to their respective attitudes towards the founder of Christianity. This difference developed out of Holyoake's comment upon an article published by the *Ayr Observer* on "Popular Infidelity" which had declared that the *Reasoner*, *Free-thinker*, and *Cooper's Journal* all abounded in ridicule and sneers against Christianity. Holyoake denied the truth of this charge, and asserted that on the contrary "*Cooper's Journal* abounds in

eulogies upon the character of Christ so extravagant and fulsome that they must be particularly distasteful to Christ, if he is conscious of it."<sup>7</sup> Cooper challenged this statement in a letter which reminded Holyoake that he had offered no objection when, at a fireside conversation a few days previously, Cooper had expressed his fervent admiration for the character of Christ, but on the contrary had remarked that he thought "it well there was someone among the freethinkers who could maintain such principles conscientiously."<sup>8</sup> In his reply Holyoake explained:

My not making my usual objections at the visit Mr. Cooper alludes to should not have misled him to suppose my acquiescence in his "admiration." Mr. Cooper will remember many instances of my professed dislike of obtruding my opinions controversially upon my friends—which would be the maxim of St. Paul "Be constant in season and out of season" reduced to practice—a maxim that has converted many a friendship into a punishment. I shall ever save my friend Mr. Cooper from this annoyance, which he would ill bear; but, to save him from misconstruing the quality of my silence, I shall always be ready to tell him, at proper times and in proper places, that his "fervent admiration" of the character of Christ is to me as inexplicable as ever, and as indefensible.<sup>9</sup>

During the first part of 1850 Cooper lectured at five different London institutions, as follows. At the Hall of Science from January 6 to February 17 he continued to deliver fortnightly the lectures summarized in the "Critical Exegesis." From March 3 to May 26 his Sunday lectures at this hall were a repetition of orations previously delivered elsewhere. At John Street his fortnightly Sunday evening lectures of January 13 and 27 dealt with English history; after that until May 19 his subjects were: Defoe, Newton, Columbus, Cortez, Pizarro, Washington, Rousseau, and Voltaire. At the Finsbury Institution he spoke on Newton, Milton, and Sir William Jones on Mon-

<sup>7</sup> *Reasoner*, October 31, 1850.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* November 6, 1850.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* December 11, 1850.

days during January and February. At the Gould Square Mechanics Institute during the same months he lectured on Wednesday evenings on two of these same figures and also on the Age of Elizabeth and the Wrongs of Ireland. At Temperance Hall, Broadway, Westminster, he lectured four times on similar subjects.

He departed from London for his customary tour of the provinces on May 27 visiting Coventry and Hull, and arriving in Newcastle-on-Tyne on June first. After speaking twice at Newcastle on Biblical subjects in his accustomed critical manner, on Monday, June 3, he visited Sunderland. Here a "New Connexion" Methodist objected to the lecturer's avoiding all mention of religion in his remarks upon Milton, and attributing the poet's peaceful death to his virtuous life. Cooper angrily offered to cancel his lecture on Burns for the following evening, but when a large majority of the audience expressed their disagreement with his critic, he consented to deliver it. For the rest of the week he spoke in Newcastle, and except for a visit to North Shields, he continued to give addresses in this city until the end of the month.

On July 1st he proceeded to Stockton, then to Middleborough, and then for two days he remained in York. After a visit to Leeds he continued on to Bradford, Keighley, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Doncaster and Rotherham, finishing up at Sheffield.

Through the unfailing generosity of W. E. Forster he was able to spend three weeks of this summer at the hydropathic sanitorium situated at Ben Rhydding, near Otley, in Yorkshire.<sup>10</sup> He left this institution feeling in better health than at any time after his imprisonment, and by the daily use of wet bandages and a "dripping sheet" he hoped to continue so. From Ben Rhydding he went to the Staffordshire Potteries, where he was gratified to find

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Cooper's Journal*, p. 154 and *Life*, p. 328. The autobiography mistakenly dates this visit during the following year.

that in consequence of his having been refused the use of the Town Hall some months before, the Chartists of Hanley and Shelton had recently purchased a vacated Primitive Methodist chapel, and converted it into a meeting place of their own, where Cooper was invited to address them whenever he came to the Five Towns.<sup>11</sup>

The year 1850 was notable in Cooper's life, among other things, as marking the publication finally of his historical romance *Captain Cobler*, that fateful work which while still in manuscript had seduced its author to seek his fortune in London, and whose completion had been one of the literary labors which had filled up his prison hours. This story was issued first in twenty-five weekly parts priced at a penny each. The first number was presented gratis to all purchasers of the ninth number of *Cooper's Journal* (March 2, 1850). Thereafter a new part appeared each week for eighteen weeks; but the nineteenth number did not come out until the first of October, publication of the romance remaining in abeyance during the suspension of the *Journal*, but continuing for three or four weeks beyond the termination of that publication. Late in 1850 Watson issued it as a bound volume of 402 pages, at a list price of half a crown.

Like so much of Cooper's early work, *Captain Cobler* was inspired by the historical associations of Lincoln, Torksey, Gainsborough, and neighboring towns on the Trent, all of which figure prominently in the story. It is a historical novel of the Walter Scott school, the action taking place during the reign of Henry VIII. That monarch himself appears in the final pages, and many of the author's early poems are introduced into the text. The plot centers around the religious rising of 1536 known as the "Pilgrimage of Grace," which planned to overthrow the king because of his attacks upon the monasteries and other Catholic organizations; and then to form a new government, principally from the priesthood. The leader of the rebel-

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<sup>11</sup> *Cooper's Journal*, October 19, 1850.

lion in the vicinity of Lincoln Cooper represents to have been the Benedictine Prior of Oxeney and Barlings. To impress the minds of the common people, whose support was highly necessary, this leader assumed a peculiar dress, one of the distinguishing marks of which was a large leatheren apron tied on over the wearer's other apparel, from which fact he became known as "Captain Cobler," the ancient spelling of this last word being retained. As the uprising instigated by this courageous prelate forms the backbone of the novel, all the other characters and sub-plots being connected to it in one way or another, the romance is well named "Captain Cobler; or the Lincolnshire Rebellion: an historical romance of the reign of Henry VIII." This type of fiction is still popular [witness the wide vogue of *Anthony Adverse*] and while it would be folly to rank Cooper among its great practitioners, his romance equals in interest and power the productions of a Clara Reeve or Jane Porter. *Captain Cobler* displays a wide acquaintance on the part of its author with old chronicles of the period, and also his excellent understanding of medieval and renaissance life and character and remarkable knowledge of Gothic architecture and of the medieval remains in and about Lincoln. The plot is woven with sufficient skill to sustain the reader's interest until the end, and the dozen principal characters and score of minor ones are introduced and kept before the reader with considerable adroitness. It is true that the characters who represent the nobility are largely conventional, two of the most important, Lord Hussey and the fair Lila, being mere Dresden-china figures; but the representation of commoners is, on the whole successful. At times the stock repetitions are tedious, and occasionally the author falls into the error of exhibiting his antiquarian lore at too great length.

The plot too, though not lacking in interest, abounds in cliches, such as castles and town-houses with secret passages; a scheming, highly-connected Jewish money-lender; two pairs of twins, born on the same day of mothers who are sisters and two of them spirited away in childhood and

reared one as a gosherd and the other amongst the gypsies; and the rescue of the gypsy-bred heroine in the nick of time from assault first by the king of the gypsies, and later by Henry VIII of England.

Yet in spite of its obvious faults the volume remains an impressive performance for a man of Cooper's limited opportunities. His real enthusiasm for the period, and the long incubation and repeated revision which the work received, make it one of his best prose productions. Had this romance received the imprint of some well-known publishing house it might have achieved popularity, and increased the author's reputation. As it was, its publication by the noble but obscure James Watson,<sup>12</sup> whose name when recognized conveyed to middle-class readers the idea of a dangerous radical and atheist, who had been several times in prison, effectively shut it out from consideration by the vast public which could afford to buy it. Warner's *Dictionary of Authors* in its article on Cooper states that "His *Captain Cobler* and *Poetical Works* are well-known" but I have been unable to find a single review of the work, and it does not seem to have sold more than the original limited edition.

Cooper resumed his speaking engagement at John Street and the Hall of Science at the beginning of September, speaking at these institutions alternately on Sunday during the remaining four months of the year. During October he also spoke on Monday evenings at the Temperance Hall. During these months he also went out twice to Cheltenham, and once each to Norwich and the pleasant rural town of Diss. During September he lectured on Defoe, Beckett, and the philanthropists Gilpin, Oberlin, and John Howard. His topics for October were: Washington, Byron, Sir William Jones, Dr. Johnson, Robert Peel, Shelley [twice] and the Poetry of Peter Pindar. At John Street during November he delivered a series of week-day

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<sup>12</sup> For a brief account of the life and character of Watson, see the *Memoir* by W. J. Linton.

lectures on Astronomy, and on Sundays a series on the history of Greece, which was not concluded until March 1851.

So eloquently did he plead the need of the John Street organization for new quarters at the close of one of his Sunday evening addresses in November that one member of the audience arose to pledge five hundred pounds towards the erection of such a social center as Cooper had described. Others followed with pledges of one hundred pounds, twenty pounds, etc. In view of the general enthusiasm Cooper promised that specifications would be immediately drawn up, and all interested given an opportunity to contribute to a building fund.<sup>13</sup> The following month a Metropolitan Building Company was duly organized, with the announced intention of erecting [or purchasing] a hall provided with classrooms, library, book-shop, and auditorium seating at least three thousand persons.<sup>14</sup> Cooper was appointed Corresponding Secretary, and also made a Trustee. Had there been other supporters of the plan as able and energetic as he it might have been carried through. As it was, the Metropolitan Institution Company [as it was named at the time of its incorporation] disposed of only 2097 shares in four years,<sup>15</sup> which provided little more than half of the five thousand pounds necessary, even though the shares could be bought by paying installments as small as six-pence per week. As W. D. Saull sadly reported, the project had not touched the mass of the people,<sup>16</sup> and eventually it had to be abandoned.

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<sup>13</sup> *Reasoner*, November 20, 1850.

<sup>14</sup> *Reasoner*, March 12, 1851.

<sup>15</sup> *Reasoner*, March 2, 1853.

<sup>16</sup> *Reasoner*, January 21, 1855. The John Street premises were held on a lease which expired in 1857.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ALDERMAN RALPH AND THE FAMILY FEUD THE END OF SECULAR LECTURING

From the time of his release from prison until the beginning of 1848 the Coopers lived in lodgings: first in Blackfriars Row, the address from which the prefaces to the *Prison Rhyme* and *Baron's Yule Feast* were dated; then in Islington; and finally in Devonshire Street, Red Lion Square. But from February 1848 they occupied a comfortable house at 5 Park Row, Knightsbridge, with windows overlooking Hyde Park. Cooper was able to lease this dwelling because the deterioration of the neighborhood had lowered the rent and brought it temporarily within his means. Although the house had to be approached through a tenement property its windows commanded a view of the Park, with its fashionable parade, and glimpses of royalty. But in the spring of 1851 the crowds which poured into London to attend the Great Exhibition and visit Crystal Palace made the Hyde Park location intolerably noisy and disagreeable. To escape the hubbub and confusion Cooper sublet the premises for the summer, sent Mrs. Cooper to her sister in Lincoln, and set off himself on a six months' lecturing tour.<sup>1</sup>

He went first to the Five Towns, where he remained for about a fortnight; then to Manchester, where he stayed for another two weeks. On June 2 he left Fleetwood by steamer for Belfast. He spent eleven days in this Irish city, during which he delivered nine addresses. At first the Irish people seemed to him little different from the English, but his final impression was that "it was diffi-

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<sup>1</sup> During the first part of 1851, until his departure in May, Cooper lectured on Sunday evenings at John Street and the Hall of Science alternately. Holyoake advised his Scotch subscribers that Cooper was "incomparably the most attractive of all our metropolitan lecturers."

cult to get fair hold of their minds," and that the workingmen "had no strong sympathy with the distinct idea of Chartism."<sup>2</sup> At the conclusion of his final lecture<sup>3</sup> he remarked to the audience that their faces seemed so English, he could hardly think they should class themselves with the Keltic race.<sup>4</sup> A young workman immediately sprang to his feet to spurn the idea "that they were either like the English, or wished to be like them," and to proclaim that "Nationality—*independent nationality!*" was the one desire of all patriotic Irishmen.<sup>5</sup> His 1851 account of this incident Cooper concluded as follows:

I did not shrink from uttering my conviction that the separation of Ireland from England was impracticable; and avowed that as an Englishman I could not desire it, though I did not wonder Irishmen wished for it when I remembered the seven hundred years of misgovernment and wrong their country had experienced from mine.<sup>6</sup>

The account in the autobiography, which is more circumstantial, exhibits also an interesting change of emphasis:

"If you had what you call 'Nationality'—that is entire separation from England—today, what would you have tomorrow? I will tell you. Intestine war and bloodshed—fierce war between Protestant and Catholic—and finally, domination by some foreign power, whether French or American; and while the new conquerors used you to mortify Old England, you would be no happier yourselves, and would soon desire to unite with us again."

The elder part of my audience cried "Hear, hear," vociferously; but the younger cried "No, No!" and I speedily brought the meeting to an end. I may briefly say I have never felt any uncontrollable desire to visit Ireland since.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Leader*, August 23, 1851. This long and detailed account of Cooper's tour of Ireland and Scotland was the work of Cooper himself. In a letter to Maurice Dr. Jelf characterized this publication as "socialistic, communistic, and atheistic."

<sup>3</sup> On Shelley. Cooper states, "Such commendation as I gave his beautiful poetry seemed to excite ten times the applause I received when I eulogized our glorious Shakespere or Milton"—*Life*, p. 324.

<sup>4</sup> *Leader*, August 23, 1851.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Life*, pp. 325-326.

Leaving Belfast on Saturday, June 14, he landed at Androssen in Scotland at eight that evening, and proceeded at once to Glasgow. He had his first experience with the strictness of the Scotch sabbath next day, when he found it impossible to obtain either food or drink without returning to his lodgings. In Glasgow Cooper spoke five times; and at Paisley nearby four times. He also visited several other neighboring towns, spending more than three weeks altogether in and around Glasgow. The warm hearts of the Scotch people and the magnificent scenery of their country made his visit to Scotland "superlatively enjoyable," although he had no patience with their "gloomy, slaving, soul-grinding doctrine and practice of Sabbatarianism."

While at Glasgow he seized the opportunity to visit the birthplace of Robert Burns, and to call upon the poet's only living sister, Mrs. Begg, a woman then eighty years old. In response to his question he reports her as saying:

"I never saw my brother drunk \* \* \* nor did I ever know him to be drunk. It is true I saw but little of him in the latter part of his life, but his son, who was with him almost constantly, told me he never saw his father the worse for liquor but once. \* \* \* His son also said that though his father would come home late during the latter part of his life, when they lived in Dumfries, yet he was always able to examine bolts and bars, and went to observe that the children were right in bed, and always acted like a sober man" "Besides," added the intelligent old lady, "how was it possible that my brother could be a drunkard when he had so small an income, and yet a few weeks before his death, owed nobody a shilling? That speaks for itself." Mrs. Begg further confirmed what I also learned in Glasgow from persons who had known every circumstance of the close of Burns' life, that Allan Cunningham has sorely mis-stated several important matters. Burns did not die in the dramatic style which Allan tells of. \* \* \* Mrs. Begg said that she had seen the two volumes of the new life of her brother by Robert Chambers, and the account was fairer than any she had ever seen before."

From Glasgow Cooper also made a trip to Loch Lomond, traveling down the lake by a small steamer to a little

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<sup>\*</sup> *Leader*, August 23, 1851.

inn at Rowerdrennan, from whence he set forth at one o'clock that same night with an Irish guide, and two young Scotch workingmen and their brides, for the top of Ben Lomond, to see the sun rise. When they arrived at the summit they saw the whole countryside spread at their feet, a view which had, one of the young Scots said, inspired a countryman of his to exclaim, "Eh, mon Jock, are not the works of the Almighty deevilish?" Cooper alone made the trip without the aid of whiskey.<sup>9</sup>

Aberdeen, his second stop, impressed the lecturer as being an unusually fine city. The great success of his four speeches there may help to account for this impression. At Dundee, where he visited the grave of Thom, he spoke three times; on one occasion getting into an excited debate "on the foolish doctrine of physical force." For this "loss of philosophy" he asked pardon in his newspaper article, as he did also for losing his temper with certain young teetotal enthusiasts of Edinburgh for their attempt to "dictate that I should practice what I know I could not practice without losing my strength and capacity for constant labour."<sup>10</sup>

Edinburgh, because of the magical effect of its situation, he ranked as the finest city in Britain. At Paisley he had visited the traditional birthplace of Wallace, "in company with the poet Mitchell;" and at Dumferline, where he spoke twice, he hunted up the abbey where Robert Bruce lies buried.

Upon learning that Cooper was engaged to speak at Lasswade "Dr. Black," [presumably Adam Black, the Scottish publisher] advised him to call upon DeQuincey, who was then living with his daughters about a mile beyond that place. Cooper did so, presented the "opium-eater" with a copy of the *Purgatory*, and "had two hours delightful conversation with him."<sup>11</sup> In his autobiography Cooper describes how angry DeQuincey's elder daughter

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Leader*, August 23, 1851.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

became because of their visitor's Chartist opinions, chiding her father for not maintaining his political principles against the radical. Poor DeQuincey was greatly distressed lest Cooper should take offence, but he was merely amused. After dinner the kind-hearted essayist insisted on walking all the way back to Lasswade with his guest, in consequence of which Cooper was half an hour late in beginning his address.<sup>12</sup>

About the middle of August Cooper returned to England, where he lectured in some twenty-five towns in the North, the most important being Newcastle, Carlisle, Oldham, Halifax, Bradford, Leeds, York, and Hull. He traveled on the railways always by third-class coach, a conveyance which at that time was hardly better than an open carriage, as it permitted the snow to enter in winter and the rain in summer. Such exposure sometimes brought on a severe cold, and probably laid the foundation for the bronchitis which afflicted Cooper in his old age. He completed his tour by lectures in Norwich, Leicester, Hastings, Portsmouth, and Salisbury, interspersed with visits to Stratford and Stonehenge. Arrived in London once more at the beginning of November, he rounded out the year with lectures on Roman history at John Street, and the City Road Institution. At a "Free Discussion Festival" held on December 29 at the Hall of Science, Cooper was one of the speakers, and he also sang twice. He promised to speak again at the meeting of the following month, and to sing "Spread the Charter," but illness prevented his attendance.

A reconciliation between Cooper and Serjeant Tallfould was effected this year under curious circumstances. A man calling himself Edward Youl, who had contributed frequently to *Howitt's Magazine* during the 1840's, successfully insinuated himself into the intimate acquaintance of both Howitt and Cooper. Towards the end of 1851 he disappeared from London. Early in 1852 Lord Brougham

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<sup>12</sup> *Life*, p. 327.

received a letter purporting to be from Howitt, and asking for money. After Brougham had complied with the request he discovered that he had been swindled. A little later Cooper learned from W. J. Fox that Talfourd had been similarly approached by a forged letter, and had been happy to send Cooper twenty pounds to defray the expenses of his supposed illness. When a search was instituted for Youl all trace of him vanished in Liverpool. Cooper called upon Talfourd to explain the fraud, and was informed that he cared nothing about the loss of the money, except that it had not reached its intended destination. The Serjeant feared that Cooper was not getting rich by authorship, and pressed him so earnestly to accept a check in place of the embezzled one that Cooper finally consented to do so. When he came to examine the order on Coutts' Bank, he found it was for twenty-five pounds.

Fox was greatly amused when he learned of Talfourd's generosity, and expressed his conviction that the eminent man was taking this means to relieve his conscience for his speech against Cooper in the House of Commons on June 20, 1848, shortly after the last great Chartist demonstration. On that date Fox in the course of a speech supporting Hume's motion for an enlargement of the franchise referred incidentally to Cooper, "whose noble poem," he said, "was brought before the reading public chiefly through the recommendation of the noble gentleman opposite [Disraeli]"<sup>13</sup> Talfourd, who upon resumption of the debate on July 6 was the next speaker in opposition, replied that while "he did not yield to his friend or to the honourable gentleman opposite in their intelligent admiration of that magnificent poem \* \* \* he [the Serjeant] had been one of the counsel for the prosecution of Thomas Cooper, and he felt compelled to state the truth, that Thomas Cooper had delivered harangue upon harangue to the people in the Potteries, and the speeches of Thomas Cooper

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, p. 340; cf. *Hansard*, 3rd ser. xcix, 940-941. Cooper's summaries of the Parliamentary speeches in his autobiography are quite accurate, although not verbatim quotation.

were followed by deeds of violence."<sup>14</sup> The rules of debate preventing Fox from speaking a second time, he requested Richard Cobden to get up and reply in [Cooper's] behalf. And illustrious Richard Cobden did reply. He felt surprised, he said, that the learned Serjeant should have spoken of Cooper in the way he did; for everyone who knew Mr. Cooper believed he had never advised or counseled violence, and no one regretted the occurrence of the violence alluded to more than Mr. Cooper himself.<sup>15</sup>

Fox told Cooper that a few days afterwards at one of Talfourd's frequent social gatherings at his house in Russell Square, the Serjeant admitted that he did not really believe Cooper had advised violence, and said he could not understand his own moral obliquity in speaking as he had; to which Fox jovially replied that he had spoken "not for conscience but for the Minister's"—having in mind a judgeship.<sup>16</sup> Talfourd at that time had requested Fox to persuade Cooper to come to see him, but Cooper had declined the invitation. The Youl fraud finally brought the two men together, and Cooper states that Talfourd's subsequent gifts to him amounted altogether to nearly a hundred pounds.<sup>17</sup> The Honorable Thomas Erskine, the presiding judge at Cooper's last trial, Kingsley told him, likewise always spoke of him with the utmost kindness,<sup>18</sup> and whenever he published a new book immediately sent out for a copy.<sup>19</sup>

The success of Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, published by Chapman and Hall in 1850, induced Cooper to try his hand at producing a novel, and during the next four years he made four different attempts in this form. One was never completed; another was revised and combined with another work; and two were published by George Routledge and Company, the first in 1853 and the second in 1855.

<sup>14</sup> *Life*, pp. 340-341; cf. *Hansard*, 3rd ser. c. 178-179.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 341; cf. *Hansard*, 3rd ser. c. 184.

<sup>16</sup> *Life*, p. 342.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> The letter quoted later from Kingsley to Hughes, referring to Erskine [but published with his name omitted] does not, however, support this statement.

<sup>19</sup> *Life*, p. 343.

Cooper's first attempt was the result of Edward Chapman's remark to him, "I should think *you* could write a Chartist novel, and a successful one. You see Kingsley has succeeded; and you ought to know a good deal more about Chartism than he can possibly know."<sup>20</sup> Cooper accepted the suggestion, set to work, and by the end of 1851 had finished his first work of this kind. It may have been this production which he had in mind when he wrote in the final number of *Cooper's Journal*, "Although I have no inclination to appear in periodical literature again, I trust, at no very distant time, to produce something my countrymen of the Present and the Future may judge worthy of preservation."<sup>21</sup> The completed manuscript was delivered to Mr. Chapman, who submitted it to the firm's literary adviser for his opinion. Forster returned it with the comment, "Evidently prose fiction is not Mr. Cooper's forte."<sup>22</sup> This criticism aroused Cooper to resolve that he would some day write a novel which would be accepted in spite of John Forster's opinions. Wisely putting the rejected manuscript to one side [he later re-worked parts of it into *The Family Feud*] he commenced upon an entirely new story, which he finished in ten months, writing the final pages on the morning of Wellington's funeral, after sitting up all night. Cooper was at this time, 1852, forty-seven years old, and his childhood had been passed amidst the excitements of Wellington's victories. As he watched the funeral car pass out of sight, on his way to the office of Chapman and Hall, he felt that the death of the Great Duke had broken the coupling-chain of the age.

Once more, owing, Cooper was convinced, to the continued hostility of Forster, Edward Chapman returned his manuscript. Cooper may in this instance have been mistaken about Forster; at any rate when the book was finally issued it was handsomely reviewed in the *Examiner*.

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, p. 334.

<sup>21</sup> *Cooper's Journal*, October 26, 1850.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, p. 335.

The work which Chapman had refused was accepted by Routledge, who paid the author one hundred pounds for it, and published it in 1853 under the title of *Alderman Ralph*. On the title-page the author's name appeared as "Adam Hornbook, student by his own fireside, and among his neighbours when he can obtain the arm-chair in the corner." Similar labored whimsicality appears in the full title of the work, in the headings of the twelve books into which the two volumes were divided, and in many places in the novel itself.

The division into twelve books, and the dedication of the first chapter of each book to a confidential address to the reader are evidently in imitation of Fielding; while the portrayal of the honest, eccentric alderman as a hero, and of Sir Nigel and his lawyer as villains owes something—as do Cooper's grotesque humble characters—to the influence of Charles Dickens and Douglas Jerrold, the only writers of fiction among his contemporaries whom Adam Hornbook deemed worthy of perusal.

Like the mass of novels before and since, *Alderman Ralph* was for its day only, and it is not likely to be looked into again except by the curious student of the period. But if no better than a hundred other novels of the time, it was certainly no worse; and the reader capable of ignoring its naiveté archness, and determined sprightliness will find that it relates a story of no little interest.

The style throughout is garrulous, leisurely, and markedly colloquial, as illustrated by the title-page description of Adam Hornbook, as well as by the title itself, which reads in full: "Alderman Ralph: or, the History of the Borough and Corporation of the Borough of Willowacre, with all about the Bridge and the Baronet, the Bridge-Deed and the Great Scholar, the Toll-Keeper and his Daughter, the Fiddler and his Virtues, the Lawyer and his Rogueries, and all the rest of it."

The originals of Alderman Ralph and of some of the other members of the Willowacre Corporation are to be found in the opening sketch of the second volume of *Wise*

*Saws and Modern Instances*, entitled "The Old Corporation." Dr. Dingyleaf is foreshadowed by "Master Zerubbabel, the Antiquary," of the same work, and Jack Jiggs owes something to the earlier "Phil the Fiddler." Willow- acre on the Slowflow represents in its essential features the Gainsborough-on-the-Trent of Cooper's youth.

Favorable notice of *Alderman Ralph* appeared in the first number of the *Northern Tribune*, a radical monthly founded by Joseph Cowan in 1854, which sold for four-pence, and was published at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Cooper contributed four articles to this publication: two fictional sketches later included in *Old Fashioned Stories*, and two biographical sketches,—one of Bernard Gilpin, the other of John Wickliffe. Beginning with the issue of February 1855. Cooper also published in the *Northern Tribune* a third series of "Letters to Young Men of the Working Classes."<sup>23</sup>

A favorable review of *Alderman Ralph* appeared also in John Forster's *Examiner* on November 12, 1853. The history of this notice, which the autobiography confuses with a later notice of the *Family Feud*<sup>24</sup> Cooper relates as follows:

I went to 5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, one evening<sup>25</sup> with the intent of spending a couple of hours with my illustrious friend

<sup>23</sup> Selections from these "Letters" may be found in *Thoughts at Fourscore*, pp. 238-268. For the other articles vide *Northern Tribune*, i: 165, 199; 17, 52; 80, 119; 254, 284. On March 2, 1855, the *Northern Tribune* was combined with the *Reasoner*.

"As the notice of this second volume is only a few lines long, while the earlier review takes up a column and a quarter, it is evident that it was the first review which Cooper was thinking of. D. A. Wilson in *Carlyle at Threescore and Ten* [pp. 154-155] repeats this incident, which he dates 1855, evidently relying upon Cooper's account. As Cooper wrote this recollection some twenty years after it occurred his mistake was a natural one, and similar to his mistake regarding the date of one of W. E. Forster's philanthropies.

<sup>25</sup> Cooper visited Carlyle many times. One such call is alluded to by Carlyle in a letter to his mother dated December 8, 1852: "Cooper the Chartist came by appointment; a man not beautiful, 'a tiger marked with smallpox,' but possessed of honest sense too: he told us that Maurice's Tailors were all going to sixes and sevens." *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle* [Alexander Carlyle, ed.] ii: 140-141.

Thomas Carlyle. But I had not been with him more than half an hour when Mr. John Forster was announced. I met him, as the reader may suppose, without any high degree of pleasure. And though there was no treat on earth I could have desire more than to listen to the interchange of thought between two such intellects as that of Carlyle and John Forster,—I felt inclined, with the remembrance of the past, to 'cut my stick.'

And I certainly should have decamped hastily had it not been for an incident worth mentioning. A loaded truck stopped at the street door—there was a loud knock—and the maid-servant ran upstairs, breathless, to say that a huge parcel had been brought. Mr. Carlyle seemed all wonder, and muttered, "A huge parcel! *what* huge parcel?"—but I'll come down and see. And, somehow or other, we all went down to see—for there was a large wooden case, evidently containing a picture. A hammer and a chisel were soon brought, and I offered to take them, and open the case—but, no! my illustrious friend would open it himself.

"It's doubtless a picture from that old Landor," said he; and he worked away very vigorously with his implements till there was revealed a very noble picture indeed, with its fine gilded frame. It was a portrait of David Hume, in full dress—the dress he is said always to have worn when he sat down to write:

So strangely were his polished style and full-dress associated!

"Only think of that old Landor sending me this!" broke out Carlyle again and again, as we all stood gazing on the portrait with admiration.

This incident served to "break the ice" so far that I joined a little in the conversation that followed, and when Mr. Carlyle quitted the room to fetch a book that he wanted to show his friend, Mr. John Forster said to me, in a marked tone—

"You have just had a novel published by Routledge—do you happen to know whether a copy has been sent to the *Examiner*?"

I replied that I did not know; but [that] I would enquire. "Take care that it is addressed to me, will you?" said Mr. Forster; "you understand what I mean? Take care that it is addressed to me personally"—and he nodded and smiled \* \* \*

I rose to go soon after, and my illustrious friend, with the perfect kindness he has always shown me, would go with me to the street door to say "good night." So I whispered to him, in the passage, and requested him to strengthen the good intent there seemed to lie in John Forster's mind towards me. Carlyle gave me one of his humorous smiles, and squeezed my hand, as an as-

surance that I might depend upon him. And so the favorable critique of [Alderman Ralph] appeared in the *Examiner*.<sup>20</sup>

Forster's review [if it is indeed his] read in part:

There is an affectation about the title of this clever novel \* \* \* that may lead many to expect more or less puerility in its contents. This, and the fact that although of full orthodox length \* \* \* the book makes its first appearance in a couple of cheap volumes, may interfere with a full recognition of its sterling ability. But it is really a story of very great merit, and deserves a hearty good word \* \* \*

[The plot] is simply constructed, but not weak in interest, and written with a geniality and breadth of style that argues in the writer a strong and active mind \* \* \*

Alderman Ralph \* \* \* is a novel that any reader whose mind has the tone of health will be glad to read, and will read without skipping a page. So to speak there is a wholesome play of bone and muscle in it. Evidently the book has been elaborated with great care; the writer has been stimulated to a generous ambition to strive for the production not of a mere season novel, but of a sterling work; and although he has wanted strength to produce a book that will outlast his generation, he most certainly has written [such] a novel as ought not in its own right to be left unread \* \* \*.<sup>21</sup>

Two years later, in February 1855, Cooper's second novel, *The Family Feud* was published; again by Routledge. As before, the author appeared, not only on the title-page but throughout the book, as "Adam Hornbook;" and again there were twelve books, each introduced by a confidential chat with the reader. The story, although melodramatic and incredible, is told with such ingenuity, freshness, and skill that it grips the reader's attention from the start. The characters are sufficiently realistic and distinct, although the villains are unrelievedly wicked, and two of the three heroines are altogether conventional. The hero, however, is not presented as wholly faultless. The characters from low life, as before, are humorous grotesques after the Dickens model. The quarrel between the two principal families of the town is effectively worked

<sup>20</sup> *Life*, pp. 347-350.

<sup>21</sup> *Examiner*, November 12, 1853.

into the plot, and is reconciled without depending wholly upon the falling in love of the young people.

Cooper states in the autobiography that his former rejected Chartist novel formed about one third of this new romance after the Chartist parts had been completely burned out.<sup>28</sup> The book was sufficiently popular to require new editions in 1865 and again in 1892.<sup>29</sup> An interpolated passage<sup>30</sup> on Handel's "Messiah" was quoted later in *Thoughts at Fourscore*.

The *Reasoner* commended the "agreeable garrulity" and "admirable old English quaintness" of the *Family Feud*, but detected in the author "a tinge of that nervous pedantry which always betrays the self-taught."<sup>31</sup> The *Athenaeum* was more generous, declaring that:

This little book is, for its freshness, vigour, and variety, worth any half-dozen of the novels which come into the world with all the honours of binding and typography. The story is anything but probable, but there are such life-like descriptions and the incidents are so romantic, that the reader is carried on to the end without delaying to criticize.<sup>32</sup>

The *Examiner* review, which as we have seen was confused in Cooper's recollection with the earlier review of *Alderman Ralph*, is sufficiently succinct to allow of quotation in full:

Like *Alderman Ralph*, *The Family Feud* is a novel with a good deal of strength and substance as well as of interest in it. Its hero, Cain Colton, sets out as an artist with high aspirations, but these are distracted and broken by the events of a life which is much affected by the dispute in Quarrelton—the Family Feud—between

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, p. 336.

<sup>29</sup> *The English Catalogue of Books*: 1863-1871 and 1890-1897. In spite of its three editions this book has now almost completely disappeared. Except for a copy of the 1892 edition in the Columbia University Library, I have found no record of any edition of the book elsewhere in England or America.

<sup>30</sup> This consists of an analysis of the "Messiah" originally written as a program note for the Lincoln Choral Society. It was rewritten in dialogue form for the *Family Feud*, the author frankly admits, because "when you are writing for bread \* \* \* you are ready to snatch at any scrap of writing you have in your desk, and make use of it, if you can." *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 337.

<sup>31</sup> *Reasoner*, April 15, 1855.

<sup>32</sup> *Athenaeum*, March 10, 1855.

the Uphams and the Downhams. There are peculiarities of treatment in the book, such as a mixture of narrative and autobiography, leading to a too frequent introduction of the author as chorus on the stage, which we would like to see less prominent in any future work from the same hand, for the novel is a good one. There is plenty of interest in it, plenty of feeling, of shrewdness, and of good humour. There is a healthy vigour in its style, too, that atones for many evident defects, and we can heartily commend it to general liking.<sup>33</sup>

In his younger years Cooper had dreamed of some day rising to fame by means of authorship, like another Johnson or Goldsmith;<sup>34</sup> but although his novels, like the *Purgatory of Suicides*, enjoyed a respectable sale, they did not make him either rich or famous and after one more attempt, *The Wharfdale Beauty*, which he never completed, he abandoned the field of novel writing forever. Routledge, who had paid him one hundred pounds for each of the manuscripts accepted, refused his request for an advance of money upon the third manuscript while still incomplete; and during the months which followed Cooper was too unsettled in mind and feelings to be able to write fiction.

During the four years between 1852 and 1856 Cooper had continued to lecture without cessation. No matter what other work he might be engaged upon at the same time, the weekly addresses had to go on, for it was by them that he earned his daily bread.<sup>35</sup> After four lectures on Roman History at John Street in February 1852 he gave up speaking at this institution for a time, and thereafter was able to lecture at the Hall of Science weekly instead of fortnightly. After a series of eight lectures on the French Revolution and three on Napoleon at this institution, he lectured in May on the English poets, and in June upon the discovery of America, and the civilization and conquest of Peru and Mexico. After lecturing

<sup>33</sup> *Examiner*, May 5, 1855.

<sup>34</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 367.

<sup>35</sup> During 1852 he also added to his income by contributing occasionally to *Lloyd's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper*, of which during this year Douglas Jerrold had assumed the editorship. See *Douglas Jerrold, Dramatist and Wit*, ii: 581.

until the end of July he left the platform for two months in order to complete the writing of *Alderman Ralph*. Returning to it in October he delivered five lectures on Wellington, whose death had occurred during the previous month, and followed these by commencing on November 7 his first series of lectures on the History of England, which continued until the end of May 1853. During 1852 he also made lecturing trips to Bristol, Cambridge, Peterborough, and Lincoln.

An unsigned advertisement in the *Reasoner*, stating that "a gentleman who has had some years' experience as an editor and sub-editor of a weekly newspaper \* \* \* is anxious to obtain an editorial engagement on a London or provincial newspaper,"<sup>36</sup> seems to indicate that Cooper would have been glad to return to journalism at this time; but the advertisement led to nothing.

With regard to Sunday lecturing, the *Newcastle Chronicle* had commented during the previous year:

Strange and inconsistent with the day are the topics then discussed. It has been our lot to hear some of the speakers, and we avow our conviction that worse teachers the people could not have. Some of the topics on such occasions are as follows: The Poetry of Byron \* \* \* the Wrongs of Ireland \* \* \* the Writings of Thomas Paine, the Moral World of Robert Owen, the Probability of an English Republic, the Downfall of Priestcraft, and the Truth of Atheism. To hear some of these lecturers, five or six hundred men will pay a penny each; others pay twopence for a "reserved seat," there being an aristocratic spirit even among republican infidels. \* \* \* The spirit of such meetings is disloyal and wicked. The most violent sayings are applauded. Blasphemy is *encored*; a sneer at the Church is always welcome; and he who speaks evil of the Scriptures is sure of a hearty cheer. Such are some of the Sabbath Assemblies for the "Regeneration of Europe."<sup>37</sup>

Although the champion of orthodoxy who penned these lines does not actually mention Cooper, he may well have been thinking of him, as Cooper had discussed most of the topics mentioned, and had appeared in Newcastle many times.

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<sup>36</sup> *Reasoner*, September 1, 1852.

<sup>37</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, April 18, 1851.

He resumed lecturing at John Street on Sunday, May 8, 1853, and for the remainder of the year spoke once more first at this institution and then at the Hall of Science. After two freethought lectures in May,<sup>38</sup> he began on the first Sunday in June a series on the Italian, Dutch, Flemish, Spanish, French, and English schools of painters [with one lecture on Sculpture and Architecture]. These addresses were delivered alternately at the two institutions during June, July, and August, concluding September 4. Concerning them Cooper writes that he pointed out to workingmen "the chief features of excellence" in the National, Dulwich, Bridgewater, and Hampton Court galleries, with all of which he was familiar from having spent many hours studying their collections; his passion for pictures being almost as violent for a time as his passion for music had been formerly.

During March he lectured twice at the Tower Hamlets Literary Institute, Bethnal Green, and twice there also during April, the last time on Washington.

Eleven years earlier, on February 16, 1842, Cooper had attended a meeting at the Hall of Science in Manchester, to protest against the confinement of Charles Southwell in Reading Gaol for the "crime" of blasphemy.<sup>39</sup> On July 10, 1853, when Southwell opened a new secular hall in St. George's Road, near the Elephant and Castle, in a building formerly used as a chapel, Cooper delivered the opening lecture, his subject being "The Cultivation of the Mind the Greatest Source of Human Happiness." From July 24 until the end of October Cooper continued to appear at the St. George's Road hall every Sunday evening. At the Hall of Science beginning on October 16 he gave a second series of lectures on English History. As before,

<sup>38</sup> In April Cooper offered to debate the divine origin of the Bible with the Reverend J. Howard Hinton. The clergyman courteously declined the discussion.

<sup>39</sup> *Northern Star*, February 19, 1842. Like Cooper, Southwell subsequently returned to Christianity. For a scurrilous article on the "apostacy" of these two from free thought see Robert Cooper's *Investigator* for January, 1857.

these were continued regularly until May of the following year. At John Street during October and November he spoke on "the late Duke of Wellington," and in December on the exploits of Nelson and of General Napier.

This year, 1853, he lectured every Sunday without exception, in addition to speaking several times on week days. It was in 1853 also that Chapman and Hall brought out the third edition of the *Purgatory of Suicides*, and that *Alderman Ralph* made its appearance.

He wrote Kingsley in October, 1853, with reference to a young friend who had come under that clergyman's influence:

My friend \* \* \* says you are trying to convert him to orthodoxy \* \* \* I wish you success with him, and I had almost said I wish you could next succeed with me; but I think I am likely to stick where I have stuck for some years—never lessening, but I think never increasing, in my love for the truly divine Jesus—but retaining the Strauss view of the Gospel.<sup>40</sup>

Kingsley replied on November 2 from Eversley:

Your friend is a very noble fellow. As for converting either you or him,—what I want to do is to make people believe in the Incarnation, as the one solution of all one's doubts and fears \* \* \* As for Strauss, I have read a great deal of him, and the preface carefully. Of the latter, I must say that it is utterly illogical, founded on a gross *petitio principii*; as for the mass of the book, I would undertake by the same fallacious process, to disprove the existence of Strauss himself \* \* \* As long as you see in Jesus the perfect ideal of man, you are in the right *path*, you are going toward the light, whether or not you may yet be allowed to see certain consequences which, as I believe, logically follow from the fact of his being the ideal.<sup>41</sup>

In reply Cooper wrote in part:

Ah! that grim Strauss, how he makes the iron agony go through my bones and marrow, when I am yearning to get hold of Christ! \* \* \* Can you help me? I wish I could be near you so as to have a long talk with you often. I wish that you could show me that Strauss's preface is illogical, and that it is grounded on a *petitio principii*. I wish you could bring me into a full and

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<sup>40</sup> *Letters and Memories*, 1: Note on p. 327.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

hearty reception of this doctrine of Incarnation. I wish that you could lift off the dead weight from my head and heart, that blasting, brutifying thought that the grave must be my "end all."<sup>42</sup>

The attempt to discard the miracles, the prophecies, and most of the theology of Christianity, and at the same time to retain belief in the absolute supremacy of Christ in the field of character, resulted, as might have been foreseen, in the eventual acceptance of that supremacy of character as itself proof of Christ's divinity.

Cooper had again joined the National Chartist Association at the beginning of 1853; but a difference of opinion arising between him and some of the leaders—"a difference," writes Chartism's earliest historian, "on the question of social rights, expressed by Gammage in respectful terms and by [Ernest] Jones in very strong language"<sup>43</sup>—he angrily resigned from the rapidly disintegrating Association.

To Holyoake, now—and increasingly later—the friend of men of influence in public life and prominent in reform, Cooper wrote towards the end of 1852 that amidst his "opulence of new ties" they could afford to part, "Go on your polite way," Cooper wrote; "my rugged path suits me better."<sup>44</sup> This misunderstanding, whatever it was, proved only temporary, however; and when Holyoake was presented with a purse of two hundred and fifty pounds at a public dinner on May 26, 1853 which was attended by two hundred guests, Cooper made the first speech, on the assigned topic of "the reformers of all countries." After defining a reformer as a man whose ways the world does not like because he does not like the ways of the world, he continued:

Re-form: to form over again; to form anew. What is there so bad, so wicked, so mischievous in that? \* \* \* Science itself do we not reform that? \* \* \* If reform of science be of no worth, why boast of our immortal Newton? \* \* \*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Note on p. 327.

<sup>43</sup> Gammage, R. G., *Op. cit.*, p. 439.

<sup>44</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *Op. cit.*, 1: 197.

"Ay, ay," says some orthodox listener, \* \* \* "it's all very fine for you to stand there with so much assurance, sheltering yourself under such respectable names as those of Newton and the rest—but it won't do sir! We know you; and we know what you would be after, too. The reformers you have just mentioned did real good by their reforms of science; but you would meddle with governments and creeds, and that's dangerous meddling."

Dangerous? Is it not dangerous to neglect reform in either government or creeds? Have there been no healthy reforms in the government of this country? \* \* \* Had we better pray that the comparative freedom and mild rule of Victoria be abolished, and that her ministers adopt the paternal rule of Fum the Fourth? \* \* \* Your honored father, Mr. Chairman [Thornton Hunt] tasted of the mercies of that paternal government \* \* \* And the reform of creeds—has there been no such reform in this country? And was the reform of no value? Then we might as well go back to the old creed, and all that accompanied it \* \* \* Let us have the Pope's interdict \* \* \* and dread to open any book if the priest says we are not to read it—such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which the Pope has just put on the Index Expurgatorious \* \* \* Would the renewal of that state of things suit the orthodox of our day? I mean the orthodox Protestants and Dissenters—for doxies change you know \* \* \* And to whom do they owe their deliverance from the older priesthood? To the freethinkers of the sixteenth century \* \* \*

Freethinker! every reformer in religion, in politics, in science, in public and social improvement, is a freethinker. There could be no progress for the race without freethinking. The human world must stand still without freethinking. Set bounds to free inquiry, and you stultify the human mind. Deny the right of private judgment, and you make men slaves in soul—the worst kind of slaves. Yes: 'the right of private judgment'—noble Luther's own doctrine, the boasted doctrine of Protestantism. And I am a Protestant: and my friend [Mr. Holyoake] is a Protestant—indeed he protests somewhat strongly at times. But we are for Protestantism without fetters \* \* \* without bar, let, or hindrance to a fair, full, and free examination of the evidence, and of all the evidence \* \* \* with a bold, open, honest declaration of our conclusion, without penalties to life, liberty, or character. That is our Protestantism.

"But you are Destructives!" Yes: of all that is false and of all that is slavish. But we are Conservatives of all that is true, good, enfranchising, or useful, in fact or in moral \* \* \* We have no objection that fable be taught as fable: all that we contend for is that it should not be taught as fact. But believing

facts to be of most importance, we hold that facts should be taught first; and fables *when there's time* \* \* \*

A word about Secularism. I objected to the term when my friend introduced it, some months ago. I said I liked better the old word "Freethinker," \* \* \* associated with the names of Anthony Collins, and Thomas Woolston, and John Toland, and the greater name of Thomas Paine—and I did not like to adopt another name \* \* \* I will part with this crotchet, however, I ought, indeed, to be the very last man to object to the term "secular," for you must own I am extremely secular, as a teacher \* \* \* I seldom trouble you with any notions on theology, but science, history, or some "secular" theme \* \* \* some belonging-to-this-world subject for the staple of my plain talk \* \* \* [The Chairman] expressed \* \* \* divergence from the views of my friend. Mr. Holyoake and myself accord very nearly in what is called theology. I make this avowal openly—for I do not know why I should conceal it \* \* \* But I was just saying that we as Freethinkers, or Seculars, were conservative of all that was true in fact and in moral, and here I shall claim as freely to avow my difference with some of my freethinking friends as my accordance with them. I conserve, or preserve, the admiration and love I have unwaveringly kept from my youth up, for the moral beauty of the character of Christ. Because old myths have been fixed upon a good and beautiful moral character \* \* \* am I to deny the native excellence there is in it? No, not if some threatened to tear me to pieces with wild horses. I love the moral beauty of Socrates, and I love the moral beauty of Christ. I care not whether this be the language that other freethinkers do not like to hear \* \* \* Let them think in their way, and I will think in mine. I never learned yet that any freethinker was bound to shape his thinking by another's, and so render his name a mockery \* \* \* I shall continue to admire, and to profess admiration of the great and good man of Nazareth so long as I keep my present convictions, in spite of the orthodox who say I have no right to admire him unless I take their notion of him \* \* \*

I am less in the habit of talking about the universal brotherhood than I was some time ago.<sup>45</sup> I am afraid some of us have been reckoning too fast about the coming of universal brotherhood.

Permit me Mr. Chairman [Thornton Hunt], before I sit down, to express the peculiar pleasure I feel in seeing you there. There

<sup>45</sup> Linton tells of Cooper's "trying on one occasion to persuade me to join some 'League of Universal Brotherhood,' when I answered, 'Cooper, I know only two of the Brothers, yourself and Howitt [a man, Linton remarks parenthetically, as warm-hearted as Cooper], and I am not tempted to be a third.' Linton, W. J., *Threescore and Ten Years*, p. 40.

is a delightful and fitting association to me in the idea that our chairman tonight is the son of the chosen friend of the immortal Shelley, of Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb \* \* \* Let us organize; let us fall into the ranks, not for any physical-force battle: you know I am not any longer for that kind of fighting: but let us put on our armour, and grasp our weapons—morally and intellectually let us band together, and draw the sword of truth upon our foes, the adherents of error, and, if need be, fight—to the death! <sup>46</sup>

Six months later Cooper spoke at another unusual public meeting, a gathering in celebration of the thirty-third anniversary of the Polish Insurrection. The meeting, which took place at the Hanover Square Rooms on November 29, 1853, was addressed in Polish, French, German, and English. Cooper spoke on behalf of the workingmen of England. Linton states that the assembly was large and enthusiastic—"notable as a promise of alliance of the peoples, some day yet perhaps to result in action." <sup>47</sup>

There is no event of outstanding importance to be recorded of the year 1854, during which for the second time Cooper lectured every Sunday straight through the year, his "orations" having now become an established feature at the Hall of Science and the John Street Literary Institution. The approaching Crimean War was doubtless responsible for a lecture in September on The War in the East and the Baltic, and for a series on The History of Russia from October to December. The third and final series of lectures on English History began on October 29, and continued until April 29, 1855. On this subject Cooper had delivered over a period of three years a course of fifty-one lectures.

On Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, the last two Sundays of the year, he delivered at the two institutions where he appeared regularly his inspirational address "The Use of Time and the Duties of Life," the manuscript of which is still preserved at the Lincoln memorial chapel.

<sup>46</sup> *Supplement to the Reasoner*, June 8, 1853, pp. 369-375.

<sup>47</sup> Linton, W. J., *Threescore and Ten Years*, p. 141.

One who heard him lecture during this period of his life wrote forty years later:

Thomas Cooper was one of my political schoolmasters, and my religious confessor. Although in after years we were wide apart in doctrine, I have always regarded him with affection and respect. His lectures filled me with inspiration, they were so full of liberty. His talk was an eloquent appeal against mastership and arbitrary government; and his heroes were the great apostles of revolution, Washington, Luther, Mirabeau, and Cromwell. Whenever I read Macaulay's description of the struggle between King Charles and the Parliament, I always think of Cooper, for I seem to be reading the very words that Cooper spoke to us before Macaulay's history was written.<sup>43</sup>

The autobiography states that up to the middle of the next year, when he again left London for a tour through the North, he usually had crowded audiences. Concerning the preparation of his lectures he writes:

The reading which was necessary in order to enable me to deal with such a variety of themes, and to render my lectures attractive to crowds of intelligent hearers, was, of course, very great. At John Street, especially, I was surrounded by scores of the really *elite* of the working classes: the pianoforte makers of Marylebone, and others. The Library of the British Museum was my resort for solid reading; while in Westerton's Circulating Library, which was near me, I had ready access to the periodicals and new publications of the day. Except in those devoted days of my youth, I never read so many books as I read in the few years I lived at Knightsbridge.<sup>44</sup>

One of the letters Charles Kingsley wrote to him this year, 1854, has been published. It is dated from Torquay, where Kingsley was assisting another Christian naturalist, the father of a literary son.

I am now very busy at two things [Kingsley wrote] working at the sea animals of Torbay for Mr. Gosse, the naturalist, and thundering on behalf of sanitary reform \* \* \* My theological creed has grown slowly and naturally out of my physical one, till I have seen, and do believe more and more utterly, that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity [as they are in the Bible, and not as some preachers represent them from the pulpit] coincide with

<sup>43</sup> Trumbull, General M. M., *The Open Court* [Chicago] vi: 3348 [Aug. 11, 1892].

<sup>44</sup> *Life*, p. 346.

the loftiest and severest science. This blessed belief did not come to me at once, and therefore I complain of no man who arrives at it slowly, either from the scientific or religious side \* \* \*

I see by the way that you have given out "Two orations against the taking of human life" I should be curious to hear what a man like you says on the point, for I am sure you are free from effeminate sentimentalism, and by your countenance, would make a terrible and good fighter, in a good cause \* \* \* When I have read your opinions I will tell you why I think the judicial taking away of *animal* life the strongest assertion of the divinity and dignity of *human* life; and the taking away life in wars the strongest assertion of the dignity and divineness of national life.<sup>50</sup>

After two years of unremitting lecturing and writing, Cooper was thoroughly fatigued mentally, and tormenting doubts as to the correctness of his past belief and teaching added to his unhappiness. His increasingly determined objection to Robert Owen's doctrine that man, since he is creature conditioned absolutely by his environment, is entirely without moral responsibility, led to a growing coldness towards him on the part of the Socialists, so that his resignation from his lecturing engagements at the John Street Institution in April of 1855, at the conclusion of three lectures on the Baltic nations, and five on the history of Sweden, was not a matter of regret. At the Hall of Science, during the first four months of 1855, he completed his long series of lectures on English history. These came to an end on April 29, and he did not again lecture in London until the beginning of November, six months later.

His earlier lecture on "Nelson the National Hero" was printed in the combined *Reasoner* and *Northern Tribune* of March 18 and 25, 1855. In view of the Prison Rhyme's violent invectives against those "whose trade is slaughter," one might feel surprise to find the same pen eulogizing Nelson if he did not remember so many similar inconsistencies during the late war. It might be expected, too, that the author of "Two orations against the taking away of human life under any circumstances" would be found

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<sup>50</sup> *Letters and Memories*, i: 328-329.

ranged with Bright and Cobden in opposition to the Crimean War, which commenced in 1854; but although in peace times Cooper could forcefully remind the working class that it gained nothing but hardship from wars, and that worker-soldiers were traitors to their own order at home and abroad, when war had once been declared, he was—like many others—swept completely off his feet.

Consequently when Fox recommended him to a manufacturer of globes and relief maps named Wyld, who had prepared a large-scale model of the scene of the war and was looking about for some one to lecture upon it, Cooper accepted the commission without hesitation. Wyld sent him to Birmingham first, where he arrived about the beginning of June. A fortnight later he moved on to Manchester. Here the attraction proved so popular that the lecturer remained for nearly ten weeks, speaking two or three times every day. "I threw my whole nature into my work, as usual," he writes in the autobiography; "fought the dashing Light Cavalry charge and the Battle of Inkerman, till the crowds who listened to me almost thought they were in the attack themselves; and as the war progressed, described the attack on Redan and the winning of Malakhoff [August 1855] with fiery reality—often feeling myself so completely exhausted after the last evening effort that I could scarcely crawl to the Clarendon to get my mutton chop."<sup>51</sup>

In September, in consequence of a higher bid from an enterprising citizen of Burnley, model and lecturer were ordered to move to the Staffordshire city for a fortnight's engagement; so that the profits which might have been secured after the fall of Sebastopol [in September] had they remained in Manchester were lost—much to Cooper's disgust. At the conclusion of the Burnley engagement he shipped the model back to London, and commenced lecturing upon the war for himself, employing Charles Dyall to make illustrative sketches during the address, as

<sup>51</sup> *Life*, p. 351.

a substitute for the discarded relief map.<sup>52</sup> His itinerary for these independent lectures was given by *Knight's Town and Country Newspaper* as Rochdale, Burnley, Preston, Wigan, Leigh, Atherton, Staleybridge, Bury, Duckinfield, Tamworth [where his address was warmly eulogized by Sir Robert Peel, who acted as chairman] Congleton, and Burton-on-Trent.<sup>53</sup> Upon his return to Manchester the friends acquired through these lectures gave a dinner to him at the Clarence Hotel, at which he was presented with his portrait, painted by Bradley.<sup>54</sup>

In September 1855, just before these last lectures began, he had been compelled to relinquish the premises at 5 Park Row, where he had been residing for the past seven years, and had enjoyed many happy social hours with congenial friends. His new address, 10 Devonshire Place, Stoke Newington Green, although it possessed a garden, was not nearly so pleasant as the Knightsbridge house had been. It possessed one advantage of great importance, however—his previous rent was cut in half. Such economy had now become imperative, Cooper being once more without any settled occupation or regular income. At one time, indeed, he was in danger of being dispossessed—and was only saved from eviction by a loan from Kingsley of twenty-five pounds.

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<sup>52</sup> *Life*, pp. 351-352.

<sup>53</sup> *Reasoner*, January 20, 1856. This list differs slightly from that given in the *Life* [p. 352] which adds Haslingden and Blackburn, and omits Burnley and Atherton.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XXVII

### RETURN TO CHRISTIANITY

Now nearly fifty years old, Cooper was still living in more or less hand-to-mouth fashion, with no regular occupation except his lecturing, which could seldom be planned for more than a few months in advance. His attempts to establish a popular periodical had failed dismally. His ambitious prison poem had been published, his romances and sketches also, and in addition he had recently gotten two novels before the public; yet he was still on the outskirts of literature, with little reputation beyond his own class; and the sums he had received for his publications were so paltry that his living expenses had devoured them at once. He must frequently have pondered what the future held in store for him.

After his return to London in November, 1854, he lectured at the Hall of Science on the fourth and eleventh of that month upon the Crimean War. He seems not to have been engaged again until December 23, when he spoke at the same hall on the Prospect of a General War.

His heart was no longer in this work, however, for he was becoming more and more troubled about the correctness of his former teaching. He wrote again to Kingsley during this year about his religious difficulties, and the kind-hearted rector of Eversley sent him a long exposition of his own merciful interpretation of the doctrine of future punishment<sup>1</sup>—derived from Maurice—which was regarded generally as dangerously heterodox.

As a matter of fact Cooper was always a Christian at heart; he became a heretic, as Holyoake recognized, from indignation rather than from intellectual conviction. “Not all the thinking and speaking and writing” of the years

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<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Memories*, i: 328-329.

following his imprisonment, Cooper confessed, "could destroy the latent wish that rapt communion with God were again mine."<sup>2</sup> His conscience, always tyrannical, and never dormant, continually reminded him that while he had endeavored to teach morality he had given his hearers—and himself—no adequate reason why they should be moral, or any help in overcoming temptation. This was a real problem to many serious-minded Victorians. The answer of Matthew Arnold—

Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,  
How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare!  
"Christ," some one says, "was human as we are;  
No judge eyes us from Heaven, our sins to scan;  
We live no more, when we have done our span."  
"Well, then, for Christ," thou answerest, "who can care?  
From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear?  
Live we like brutes our life without a plan!"  
So answerest thou; but why not rather say:  
"Hath man no second life?—*Pitch this one high!*  
Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sins to see?—  
*More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!*  
Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*  
*If we then, too, can be such men as he!*

was one which Cooper in the early days of his unbelief would have accepted. But the need he now felt for some powerful extra-human aid to bear the disappointments and sorrows and active evil of the world—his longing for some philosophy which could equip both himself and those who looked to him for guidance with a map of life, with itinerary plainly marked out, and explicit directions as to what to do and what to avoid, led him finally to abandon the Arnold position.

Starting from the conviction that conscience, which he insisted was unquenchably present in every human breast, was the result and likewise the witness of a divine moral governor of the universe, Cooper advanced gradually during the next two years from simple Theism to the orthodox Victorian position; that position so effectively summed up by Lippman as a belief "that the kingdom of God is an ob-

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<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 367.

jective fact, as certain, as definite, as real, in spite of its invisibility as the British Empire, [and] that this faith is justified by overwhelming evidence supplied by revelation, unimpeachable testimony, and incontrovertible signs.”<sup>3</sup>

Cooper had returned to London thoroughly unhappy and unsettled. He felt, he writes:

as if my old work were done, and yet I knew not how to begin new work. My heart and mind were deeply uneasy, and I could hardly define the uneasiness. I felt sure my life for years had been wrong \* \* \* Why should a man be moral?<sup>4</sup> Why cannot he quench the sense of accountability? And why have you not taught your fellow men that they are answerable to the Divine Moral Governor, and must appear before Him in a future state, and receive their reward or punishment?<sup>5</sup>

It was this sense of accountability—this conviction that conscience proved the necessity of God, that worked the change in him: he states explicitly that it was not any sudden conviction of the truth of Christianity, of the reality of the miracles and resurrection, even of the divinity of Christ.<sup>6</sup> In answer to a direct question he wrote to Holyoake denying also that Kingsley was responsible, saying: “Nay, nay—dear Kingsley did *not* convert me to Christianity, nor was that work done by man, if I know my own mind and heart.”<sup>7</sup>

The public announcement of his change of heart was sufficiently dramatic. Having entered into an engagement with the Hall of Science to deliver a series of lectures be-

<sup>3</sup> Lippman, Walter—*A Preface to Morals*.

<sup>4</sup> When Emerson was in England in 1848, W. E. Forster asked him whether absence of any religious faith sapped morality. Discovering that it did not, he wondered if such persons as Emerson felt temptation, and if they did “by what help or what power” they resisted it.—Reid, T. Wemyss, *Life of W. E. Forster*, 1:253-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Life*, p. 552.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. *Thoughts at Fourscore*, chap. xix—“What our Moral Nature Proves,” especially: “I tell you when lost amidst all the difficulties which surround these great questions—baffled by vain attempts to get right in one direction and another—and often feeling as if I must give up the struggle and resign myself to a hopeless scepticism—this was where light broke upon me—[from] the exalted moral nature of Man—his aspirations after purity and rectitude, notwithstanding his lapses into error and crime”—p. 357.

<sup>7</sup> *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*, March 1904. Cooper was in his eightieth year at the time he wrote this letter to Holyoake.

ginning with the new year on the various countries of Europe, he secured a large map to illustrate them, and delivered the first address on January 6, 1856, on the subject of Russia and the Russians. The following Sunday he was advertised to speak on Norway and Sweden, but at the beginning of the lecture found himself unable to say a word, and appeared as pale as a ghost.<sup>8</sup> Then, instead of hearing an address on the subject announced the astonished audience discovered they were listening to a lecture on the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. As soon as it was realized what had happened, there was objection and some disorder. An impromptu and stormy debate took place, in which Cooper had first to assure his hearers that he had not become insane. As the great majority of his audience were freethinkers, they by no means relished the new-found doctrine. At the conclusion of their heckling an agreement was entered into that the speaker should set forth his new views two weeks later in the same hall, and at the conclusion of his address allow opportunity for reply. With his usual self-confidence, Cooper declared his willingness to meet "all the sceptics they could muster in the metropolis."<sup>9</sup>

The first of his encounters with his former allies took place at the Hall of Science on the Sunday evenings of February 10—when he presented An Argument for the Being of God—and of February 17—when he delivered his Argument for a Future State. In the first of these addresses the speaker contended for the existence of a God whom he defined as "one eternal and necessarily existent wise and powerful Being," from the evidence of design in the phenomena of nature and in the universe. In the second he stated that future reward or punishment is a necessity, as neither virtue nor vice receives its due reward in this world; also that man "*is a progressive animal*" and "*must have an immortal soul* \* \* \* because he is

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<sup>8</sup> *Life*, p. 354.

<sup>9</sup> *Life*, p. 354.

always in a state of improvement." Certainly Robert Cooper was justified in stating that:

anticipating that some extraordinary, some unanswerable evidence had induced this modification of opinion, all—pious and sceptical—were unspeakably surprised to hear only a restatement, somewhat bald and desultory, of those identical arguments which, if Mr. Cooper had been *really* on the negative side since 1843, he must often have repudiated as fallacious, inconclusive, and futile.<sup>10</sup>

Holyoake, too, wrote regarding the first theological lecture:

Mr. Cooper's arguments were without originality. They were given with his usual vivacity and earnestness, but contained nothing which our readers have not long had before them in the pages of Theodore Parker and others. How they came to operate upon Mr. Cooper is an interesting inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, the reason was that he had found neither happiness nor support in the sceptical attitude, and was driven back to religious faith to obtain them. That he did find peace of mind and happiness in Christianity, the rest of his life testifies; and he found it difficult to believe that others would not also find them if only they would accept the peculiar reasoning by which he had succeeded in convincing himself.

At the end of the paragraph just quoted Holyoake added: "If [Mr. Cooper] will furnish us with his own statement, we shall be happy to insert and consider it. In justice to himself he ought to publish in some way an accredited report of his arguments." This he never did, and it is necessary to resort to Robert Cooper's pamphlet for any account of what he said at this time. After his second address Cooper wrote to Holyoake denying that any of his adversaries had answered his arguments when given an opportunity to reply at the end of the lectures. Instead several of them had used the time for impassioned entreaties to him to take care what he was doing, as he was strengthening the hands of priestcraft. Others, with less kindly feelings towards the lecturer, denounced him and his new teaching in violent terms, so that both

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, Robert, *A Reply to Thomas Cooper's Recent Lectures on God and A Future State*, London, [1856], p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> "Reasoner," February 17, 1856.

meetings had broken up in confusion. Cooper concluded his letter, which was published in the *Reasoner* of March 2, 1856:

Let all whom it concerns to know understand that in spite of hubbub and confusion, in spite of pathetic warnings and entreaties to desist from what I am doing, and in spite of idle assurances that I can easily be answered—I say let all understand that unless *I am answered I SHALL GO ON.*

Holyoake replied [in this same issue] that Cooper was quite right not to pay attention to those who would persuade him not to do his duty by his convictions because priestcraft might thereby be strengthened—that conscience should always be placed higher than consequences. He commended to Cooper's attention, however, "the greatest book of the year on the side of free thought," Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Psychology*, which emphatically denied certain of the principles Cooper was now affirming. He recommended his friend to address himself to refuting Spencer, in whom he would find a foeman worthy of his steel.<sup>12</sup> In still another article Holyoake quoted John Henry Newman's opinion that the argument from design as proof of Christianity was futile and valueless.

In his heated and foolish response of February 22 Cooper unjustly accused the *Reasoner's* editor of truckling to ignorance, intolerance, and clamor on the part of free-thinkers; angrily denied the authority in natural theology of "such an absurd blind bigot" as Newman; and unwarantly complained that Holyoake seemed anxious that he should play the general challenger, and fight any man whose name appears in print \* \* \* I do not see that I am bound to fight Mr. Spencer, whom I never saw—and who, most probably, would deem the challenge arrogant and absurd—or any of the numerous correspondents who have sent me their challenges. I have a right to maintain my convictions as a teacher; but, as you well know, I have the "battle of life" to attend to, and cannot be fighting other battles every day of the week.<sup>13</sup>

It is only fair to remember that by his stand Cooper had indeed cut the ground from under his feet so far as

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<sup>12</sup> *Reasoner*, March 2, 1856.

<sup>13</sup> *Reasoner*, March 9, 1856.

his earning a living in the way he had been accustomed to was concerned. As we shall see, he was at his wit's end for some months as to what to do to keep a roof over his head.

Holyoake's reply to Cooper's angry letter was a model of courtesy and fairness.

Without any very definite avowal of opinion—more by tacit consent than by specific declaration—Mr. Thomas Cooper has been understood to stand on the side of those who think the doctrines of a Moral Governor of the Universe and of a Future Life “not proven.” Mr. Cooper is very impulsive, and has suddenly given lectures to show that he adopts these doctrines now. Such a proceeding on the part of one as honest as he is able, was sure to arrest attention and excite curiosity. Not being able to hear these lectures we could only learn their nature from report \* \* \*. On this account we asked him to furnish us with his own statement, not necessarily in this paper, but by publishing them in some form, under his own authority. On former occasions he indeed afforded us the means of inserting orations of his, and we valued the matter, and also the courtesy which placed it at our disposal. But in offering to give a place in the *Reasoner* to an authorized abstract of Mr. Cooper's recent lectures \* \* \* we had in view what was just to him as much as any favour to ourselves. The reader will see on another page that Mr. Cooper sends us what our American cousins term an “Indignation Letter” upon this subject \* \* \*. If we asked him to furnish us with a report, he owes it to his own well-earned importance that we did it. We do not make the same demand upon “every lecturer” because the same interest does not attach to what “every lecturer” says. Mr. Cooper does not perceive when his own position is studiously recognized, nor always where his own dignity lies, nor how to defend it \* \* \*

He says, it is “very handsome of us” offering to consider his arguments—“but what if he does not place much value on our consideration?” Very well: there is no harm done. We proposed to consider his arguments out of deference to himself. It is not everybody's arguments that we do, or would take the trouble to, consider \* \* \*. When we find a gentleman of nature's creation, like Thomas Cooper, who has won his spurs gallantly in the field of literary chivalry announce the truth of opinions we deem erroneous, and deeply misleading, unless well founded, we think that a case calling for earnest and fair consideration—and such a consideration is not only a compliment, it is more, it is a duty \* \* \*. If Mr. Cooper does not report his opinions to us, that is no reason why we should not

examine them. He is quite right in thinking that the *Reasoner* is a place where opinions are tried—and tried, too, with or without the consent of those who deliver them.<sup>14</sup>

The week following Holyoake continued:

It is not necessary for Mr. Cooper to challenge Mr. Herbert Spencer. We recommended no such thing. Having in view Mr. Cooper's complaint that he had not been answered, and that incompetent persons had attempted it, we drew his attention to the author of *Principles of Psychology*, to whom the charge of incompetency could in no way apply, and who contemporaneously maintains certain views the opposite to those Mr. Cooper announces. Many dissentients from Mr. Cooper would be better able to accept his arguments had he considered and answered Mr. Spencer.

With respect to Father Newman \* \* \* we think it worth our while to quote him where his testimony in our favour is the testimony of an enemy. To quote some absurdity Dr. Newman may hold on miracles [as Cooper had done] is no answer to his clear, capable, and reluctant admission of the failure of the Design Argument \* \* \*

Among Secularists the right to Theism is cordially conceded, as the right to Atheism is firmly maintained. If Mr. Cooper does not fall into the error of construing felt and avowed dissatisfaction with his arguments as intolerance, no Secularist, we trust, will construe his manful and honest Theism as bigotry.<sup>15</sup>

This toleration was peculiar to Holyoake,<sup>16</sup> and was not shared by Robert Cooper, who in 1857 led a successful fight against his leadership. Holyoake's remarks drew another ungracious letter from Cooper,<sup>17</sup> closing the mat-

<sup>14</sup> *Reasoner*, March 9, 1856.

<sup>15</sup> *Reasoner*, March 16, 1856.

<sup>16</sup> Secularism as Holyoake, its founder, originally conceived it, was to some extent a combination of the tenets of Jeremy Bentham and of Robert Owen. Holyoake defined its aims as the establishment of morality on a utilitarian basis by an endeavor to secure material conditions which, so far as foresight could accomplish it, would make it impossible for a man to be either depraved or poor. While he believed Secularism should be avowedly agnostic, he did not see why it need necessarily be anti-theistic, or even anti-Christian. But his idealistic proposal to unite atheists, agnostics, and theists into a single Secularist organization merely earned him the kicks of the atheists in addition to those he had always received from the orthodox. When the movement was wrested from its founder's control by Robert Cooper and Charles Bradlaugh its policy was changed to one of vigorous anti-Christian propaganda and militant atheism.

<sup>17</sup> *Reasoner*, March 16, 1856.

ter temporarily. Robert Cooper in the March issue of his little atheistical monthly the *Investigator* treated the "renegade" much more roughly, and the ill-feeling thus created steadily increased in virulence.

On March 2 and 9 Cooper repeated his Hall of Science lectures at John Street. Robert Cooper was one of those who replied to the speaker at the close of his address, and at the same time challenged him to a debate on the subjects at issue. The challenge being ignored Robert Cooper proceeded to deliver an address at John Street on March 23 announced as "A Reply to Thomas Cooper's Recent Lectures on God and a Future State." Immediately following its delivery this address was published by Holyoake as a two-penny pamphlet. About this publication a lively controversy was soon raging.

It was begun by Cooper's hasty letter after he had glanced through the pamphlet denying the truth of several of its statements and heaping abuse upon its author. Quite naturally Robert Cooper refused to publish such a letter in the *Investigator*, and Holyoake stated that he admitted it to the *Reasoner* only because he felt that it would not look well in the eyes of the Christian public if Mr. Thomas Cooper was enabled to say that he had written to the two Secularist journals \* \* \* on a matter connected with his opposition to their opinions, and his letter had been refused by both.<sup>18</sup>

Cooper charged that "the so-called 'Reply'" misstated what he had said and avoided the main points at issue. The truth of this assertion was emphatically denied, however, in published letters from the chairman of the meeting and from three members of the audience, one of whom stated that he had taken notes of Cooper's lecture and compared them with the Reply. James Savage, the most urbane of the controversialists, who had heard the lectures of both men, sensibly observed:

Regarding the charges of mis-stating the arguments, and evading the main points at issue, I think that both gentlemen would be much more likely to misunderstand each other than either would

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<sup>18</sup> *Reasoner*, May 11, 1856.

be to make any wilful mis-statement. In debate it is no uncommon thing for different combatants to differ as to what are the main points.<sup>19</sup>

Cooper's letter had concluded with a statement that

Mr. Robert Cooper refused to debate with me at the Hall of Science, and bolted from the meeting \* \* \* Again he appeared at John Street, but refused to debate with me, saying, "I hope I have more self-respect than to suffer myself to be made a mere appendage."<sup>20</sup>

The letter of Mr. Beale states that, on the contrary, Robert Cooper after listening quietly to the lecturer had stood up and said:

It is not my intention tonight to reply to Mr. Cooper, having already challenged him to a set debate *on the subject of his lectures*, which he has not accepted. I shall not run after Mr. Cooper to act as a controversial appendage *at the close of his lecture*. There is only one course open to me consistent with self-respect—to deliver a counter-lecture, which by the permission of the [John Street] Committee I shall do on the 23rd. I merely came this evening to hear his views from his own lips, which I think is just to him \* \* \* Mr. Cooper has talked of certain 'scandalous proceedings' at the Hall of Science. I beg to tell him that no one caused confusion but himself in being too irritable and domineering to listen to any opponent without repeatedly interrupting him \* \* \*<sup>21</sup>

While Robert Cooper's lecture was caustic, and occasionally off the subject, it impresses the present-day reader as a fair and candid performance, certainly every bit as much so as Thomas Cooper's account of it, and of their controversy, in the autobiography.<sup>22</sup> Henceforth, however, the two men were avowed enemies.

Holyoake stood by his old friend manfully, and the following month earned further unpopularity with his own party by publishing the following tribute:

There are few men whose personal integrity is more above suspicion than Thomas Cooper's. He has stood on the side of the people, and acted on his convictions in poverty and peril and prosperity

<sup>19</sup> *Investigator*, June, 1856; cf. *Reasoner* May 18, 1856. The former printed the letters in defense of Robert Cooper in full; the latter omitted duplication of statements.

<sup>20</sup> *Reasoner*, May 11, 1856.

<sup>21</sup> *Investigator*, June, 1856.

<sup>22</sup> See *Life*, pp. 354-355.

alike. And now, when his situation is the reverse of prosperous, he has risked his popularity with a party with whom he has so long and usefully acted, by avowing certain theological opinions he holds. Had he time or strength to report his opinions for himself, he would do far more justice than report has done him. If he is irritable, impatient, or dogmatical in discussion, let objections on these points be clearly confined to *these points*. Let them not be so expressed as to appear to be made against himself, because he avows his sincere convictions. We think his convictions erroneous, and we were prompt to say so, but we have treated Mr. Cooper with no disrespect on that account. \* \* \* Indeed we believe his opinions have always been pretty much what he avows them to be, and had he not announced them in the peculiar manner he did, they would have excited little or no surprise. He is of the religion of all poets—he is Pantheistic—he worships genius, nature, truth, beauty, and progress. He may personate his ideal of Nature as the "Moral Governor of the Universe"—he may cling to the ideas of "Future Existence," but his theology will be that of a generous heart and lofty imagination. \* \* \* Few persons would suppose from the comments that have been made, that Mr. Cooper is still of the same religion as Shelley, as Byron, as Burns, and Thomas Paine. \* \* \* We could wish [his] opinions were those of Hume, D'Holbach \* \* \* Harriet Martineau; but to stand on the side of Theodore Parker, of W. J. Fox, of Chevalier Bunsen, of Francis Newman and Mazzini, is to stand also in most distinguished ranks of progress. \* \* \*

It is a curious fact, worth noting, that a man who has done good service to the people in a particular way, and for any reason ceases to work, or changes his mode of working, often gets worse treated than those who never did, and never intend to do, anything. This is surely wrong. \* \* \* True Freethinkers will never persecute, even by epithets, those who change, nor reproach those who retire. They will have too much gratitude to forget those who have served them, too much pride to supplicate adhesion, too much dignity to resent defection, and too much justice to brand honest change of opinion.<sup>22</sup>

After the appearance of this article Cooper wrote Holyoake:

Secularism does not mean freethinking, but intolerance. I know very well that you do not wish it to be so; but another authority has arisen. Let the last number of the *Investigator* witness to that! \* \* \* You are already in hot water on my account, and I do

<sup>22</sup> *Reasoner*, May 25, 1856. See also Holyoake, G. J., *The Trial of Theism* London, 1858, chap. 2. "The Conversion of Thomas Cooper" for a further tribute to Cooper's sincerity and to his devotion to his own order.

not desire to plunge you into any more. Let others rave about the 'renegade.' They have my leave to do it.<sup>24</sup>

He ended this letter—

Unchanged in hearty friendship towards yourself \* \* \* however I may differ from you on matters of religion. I am, dear Holyoake, Yours affectionately, Thomas Cooper.

The article to which this letter referred appeared in the June issue of the *Investigator* under the title of "An Apology for Renegades." A covert attack upon Holyoake, it censured Cooper, not, ostensibly, for his new opinions—

but for the ungracious and offensive way in which he abandoned and attacked those he once held. Not content with turning his own coat, he must insist upon everyone else following his example. \* \* \* The *Reasoner* has nothing to say in condemnation of Mr. T. Cooper's rudeness to Mr. R. Cooper. Friends who are faithful to the cause of Free Inquiry must be careful how they treat renegades to the cause.

Between January 13, when he made his dramatic confession of faith, and about May 15, Cooper appears to have been entirely without employ, except for the delivery of his two theological lectures first at the Hall of Science and then at John Street, for which he was not remunerated. His new ideas were so entirely contrary to Robert Owen's teachings that the Socialist halls, particularly that of John Street, were henceforth closed to him. The Hall of Science, whose proprietor [Mr. Bendall] was now old, ill, and paralytic, also closed its doors about this time, partly for renovation, and partly because its opponents succeeded in obtaining a prohibition of further anti-religious lectures there.

During these months of enforced idleness Cooper's conviction of sin became increasingly acute, and he had to struggle against a renewal of tormenting doubts as to the reality of God's existence. His old Methodist friend of Lincoln days, Dr. Frederick James Dobson, was one of those who strengthened and helped him; Charles Kingsley

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<sup>24</sup> *Reasoner*, June 1, 1856.

was another.<sup>25</sup> With the latter Cooper carried on an active correspondence, discussing in particular the difficulties which Robert Cooper had shown were inherent in any concept of the "Person" of God. Kingsley lent Cooper several Bridgewater treatises and other books; advised him to "stick stoutly by old Paley;" presented him with a copy of *Glaucus*; and gave him in addition to spiritual comfort a hearty invitation to come to Eversley, where they could smoke their pipes, tramp the heather, and together thrash out perplexing problems of theology.<sup>26</sup>

With the other Christian Socialists—Maurice, Hughes, Ludlow, and Furnivall—Kingsley made valiant efforts to find Cooper employment, and about the middle of May finally obtained a humble post for him with the Board of Health. His work was the simple task of copying the letters written by foreign and British doctors for the use of Sir John Simon in the preparation of his famous "Report on Vaccination."<sup>27</sup> The remuneration was pitiful—one penny for every seventy words—but Cooper seems to have been able to do the work pretty much whenever he chose. He held the position for almost two years, resigning finally in May 1858.<sup>28</sup>

How desperately he needed employment is indicated by a letter Kingsley wrote to Hughes in May 1856. When publishing this letter twenty years afterwards, Hughes concealed Cooper's identity under the initial "T," and prefaced the communication with the following statement—"He [Charles Kingsley] had written to inform me that one of the old Chartist leaders, a very worthy fellow, was in great distress, and to ask me to do what I could

<sup>25</sup> *Life*, p. 371.

<sup>26</sup> *Letters and Memories*, 1: 381-383.

<sup>27</sup> Cooper, who bore all his life the scars of the attack of smallpox which nearly carried him off during childhood, was henceforth an enthusiastic advocate of vaccination.

<sup>28</sup> *Life*, p. 369.

for him." Such portion of the letter as refers to Cooper follows:

Eversley. May, 1856

Dear Tom:

I have heard from T[omas Cooper] twice today, and he is agreeable [to accepting the Board of Health work], which, if he wasn't, he is an ass, and doesn't know half a loaf is better than no bread, and you mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth. \* \* \* But this £25 of his is a grueller. \* \* \* I have offered to lend him £10—hopes it may be lending—and have written a desperate begging letter to R. Monckton Milnes, Esq., which 'evins prosper. Poor T—says tonight he has written to Forster about it—which he must have the small of his back very hard against the ropes so to do,<sup>29</sup> so the sooner we get the ginger-beer bottle out the longer he'll fight, or else he'll throw up the sponge at once; for I know his pride. I think we can raise it somehow. I have a last card in old [Thomas Erskine],<sup>30</sup> the judge who tried and condemned him, and is the dearest old soul alive, only he will have it T— showed dunhill, and don't carry a real game hackle. If I am to tackle he you must send me back those letters to appeal to his piety. \* \* \* He [Cooper] says Tom Taylor<sup>31</sup> [I believe all the world is called Thomas] has behaved to him like a brother, which, indeed, was to be expexted, and has promised him copying at a shilling an hour, and will give him a chop daily free gracious; but the landlord won't wait, which we mustn't neither. \* \* \*<sup>32</sup>

To Cooper himself Kingsley wrote the following month in regard to his new 'situation:

Rectory, Chelsea, June 14, 1856

I called and asked for you at the Board of Health, but you were away! You must not give up to low spirits—wait awhile, and all will be right. Get into harness, become a habitue of the place, get every one's good word, and in six months you will be found to be a "valuable man;" and then, in due time, you may say what you like—and rise to something really worth having.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Kingsley evidently knew nothing of the cordial relation which existed between Cooper and Forster, and which continued until the latter's death. It was Forster who sent the Christian Socialists mentioned to see the President of the Board of Health, and probably his influence counted for as much as that of all the others combined.

<sup>30</sup> This name likewise was omitted in the published letter. But cf. *Letters and Memories*, 1: 288: "In the autumn of 1852 Judge Erskine with his family settled in Eversley to be a blessing to the parish for fifteen years."

<sup>31</sup> Tom Taylor was at this time Secretary to the Board of Health.

<sup>32</sup> Hughes, Thomas, *Prefatory Memoir to Alton Locke*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> This first paragraph is given in the 1884 abridged edition of *Letters and Memories*, but is omitted in the Cambridge edition.

It is, I know it, a low aim [I don't mean morally] for a man who has had the aspirations which you have; but may not our Heavenly Father just be bringing you through this seemingly degrading work to give you what I should think you never had—what it cost me bitter sorrow to learn—the power of working in harness, and so actually drawing something, and being of real use. Be sure, if you can once learn that lesson, in addition to the rest you have learnt, you will rise to something worthy of you yet. \* \* \* It has seemed to me in watching you and your books, and your life, that just what you wanted was self-control. I don't mean that you could not starve, die piece-meal, for what you thought right; for you are a brave man, and if you had not been, you would not have been alive now. But it did seem to me that what you wanted was the quiet, stern cheerfulness, which sees that things are wrong, and sets to right them, but does it trying to make the best of them all the while, and to see the bright side; and even if, as often happens, there be no bright side to see, still "possesses his soul in patience," and sits whistling and working still till "the pit be digged for the ungodly."

Don't be angry with me and turn round and say, "You, sir, who never knew what it was to want a meal in your life, who belong to the successful class who *have*—what do you mean by preaching these cold platitudes to me?" For, Thomas Cooper, I have known what it was to want things more precious to you, as well as to me, than a full stomach; and I learnt—or rather I am learning a little—to wait for them till God sees good. And the man who wrote "Alton Locke" must know a little of what a man like you *could* feel to a man like me, if the devil entered into him. And yet I could tell you, Thomas Cooper, that there was a period in my life—and one not of months, but for years, in which I would have gladly exchanged your circumstantia, yea, yourself, as it is now, for my circumstantia, and myself, as they were then. And yet I had the best of parents and a home, if not luxurious, still as good as any man's need be. You are a far happier man now, I firmly believe, than I was for years of my life. The dark cloud has passed with me now. Be but brave and patient, and [I *will* swear now], by God, sir! it will pass with you.\*

About ten days later, on June 25, 1856, Kingsley wrote to Cooper again:

I have had a sad time, for a dear friend has died suddenly, or I would have written again to you, and called again; but I could not

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\* *Letters and Memories*, 1: 333-334.

recollect your exact address, and could not get it at the Board of Health, and meanwhile this trouble came. \* \* \*

You are in the right way yet. I can put you in no more right way. \* \* \* As for helping you to Christ, I do not believe I can one inch. I see no hope but in prayer. \* \* \* I have had to do that in past days, to challenge Him through outer darkness \* \* \* but He answered in the still small voice only; yet that was enough. \* \* \*

As for worldly matters, there is nothing to be done now, but to trust God to give you the right work in His own good time. He has, you see, given you anchorage-ground when you fancied yourself utterly adrift. Oh, trust this earnestness of His care, and "wait on Providence." Men may misuse the expression into Micawber's cant, but there is an everlasting truth in it. \* \* \* Write again soon. Your letters are always pleasant to me.<sup>35</sup>

In still another letter written during this month [or possibly a little later] Kingsley further heartened his correspondent:

I am glad to hear you are regularly at work at the Board. It will lead to something better, doubt not; and if it be dry drudgery, after all some of the greatest men who have ever lived [perhaps almost all] have had their dull collar-work of this kind, which after all is useful in keeping mind and temper in order. I have a good deal of it, and find it most blessed and useful.<sup>36</sup>

Holyoake courted further unpopularity with Robert Cooper and his partizans by printing in July still another tribute to Cooper, from an unnamed correspondent whom he described as "well known to literature and science." This writer stated that he knew Cooper only by reputation, but in his opinion Cooper deserved well of his species for the services he had rendered to the cause of humanity. He had—

fought nobly in every phase of his career for what he conceived to be the truth, and this has always been in favor of freedom of thought and speech. To teach mankind to think, and to think boldly and independently, merits acknowledgment not only from his friends, but from all who conscientiously differ from him. Honesty, singleness of aim, and eminent intellectual power, are not vulgar endowments.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, i: 335; except the first and last two paragraphs, which occur only in the abridged edition.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, i: 336.

<sup>37</sup> *Reasoner*, June 17, 1856.

After a long and difficult spiritual struggle Cooper by September had achieved sufficient certainty of mind to feel able to renew his lectures upon the nature and necessity of a divine ruler of the universe. With the backing of certain Christian friends he secured the use of the Hall of Science for a series of Sunday evening lectures. The manuscripts of the first three of these lectures—still preserved at Lincoln in the library of the memorial church—reveal very clearly the nature of his thinking at this time. The opening lecture, on September 21, 1856, dealt with The Being, Power and Wisdom of God, and again presented the argument from design. On September 28 he demonstrated The Existence, Power, All-Pervading Presence and Unity of God from a review of the teachings of astronomy and from the harmony of the spheres composing the universe. On October 5 he attempted a demonstration of The Goodness of God, based upon a general survey of organic law. In this lecture he sought to prove that inanimate nature was designed by a good God for the enjoyment of sentient creatures, and for the physical, intellectual, and moral well-being of mankind.

The lectures thus commenced were continued regularly at the Hall of Science for the next year and nine months. At first they did not include any reference to Christian doctrine. The argument for the existence of God based upon evidences of design in the universe was continued for several weeks, with a large number of alleged illustrations drawn from the sciences—particularly from “natural history.” In this connection Kingsley wrote Cooper from Eversley in December 4, 1856, recommending to his attention a number of different works on zoology and general science, and offering to bring up to London “not only Cuvier, but all the books I can think of” when he came to town on the tenth. He also prom-

ised to look Cooper up and to have some talk with him, for, he wrote:

Now that you have got upon my ground of Natural History, I think I could do more to help you in one talk than in three letters.<sup>58</sup> Upon first learning that Cooper had commenced theistical lecturing Kingsley had written to him:

You have an awful and glorious work before you, and you do seem to be going about it in the right spirit. \* \* \* Don't be down-hearted if outward humiliation, failure, insult, apparent loss of influence come out of it at first.<sup>59</sup>

It must be admitted that so far as any success in converting the working-class was concerned this was practically all that ever did come out of it.

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<sup>58</sup> *Letters and Memories*—abridged edn. pp. 193-194.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* i: 330.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BEGINNING OF EVANGELIZATION WORK DEBATES WITH LEADERS OF FREE THOUGHT

The Sunday lectures at the Hall of Science advanced gradually from the design argument substantiated by science to such topics as Man's Moral Nature, Moral Evil, and The Soul and its Future State. Holyoake, who seemed to understand Cooper better than most people, wrote regarding these lectures:

On listening some time ago to Mr. Cooper, we thought that he was most eloquent where he *felt*, and least so where he *argued*. Indeed he spoke like a man who had deep convictions, but who had "got by heart" certain theological reasons for them. He assigned three causes for Infidelity which he left us to suppose had formerly influenced himself: the bad example of many religious professors, which led many to give up religion as dishonest; the repression of free inquiry by Christians, which led many to give up Christianity as timid; and the existence of oppression contemporaneously with religion, which led many to distrust it as impotent \* \* \*

The Theistical argument put in evidence by Mr. Cooper was the well-known argument of Design \* \* \* [which] maintains that evidences of apparent "Design" in the Universe prove the existence of God. There are other higher and subtler arguments than this on the side of Theism; but the one Mr. Cooper has chosen \* \* \* is just the one the orator of nature would be impressed with—because it is the only one which admits an infinity of talking about, and in which multiplicity of illustration is permitted to supply the place of principle.<sup>1</sup>

During the final months of 1856 and the beginning of 1857 Cooper continued to progress steadily towards Protestant Christianity, until finally after a lecture on Prayer, a Duty,<sup>2</sup> in February 1857 he publicly announced his ad-

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<sup>1</sup> *Reasoner*, April 26, 1857.

<sup>2</sup> Cooper had given up prayer while he was in prison—springing up from his knees one night after he had knelt beside his iron slab and bag of straw with a resolve that he would pray no more. He never again kneeled in prayer while he was in prison [*Life*, pp. 261-262]. How difficult it was for him to resume the practice is feelingly described on pp. 371-372 of the autobiography.

herence to that faith. He wrote to Kingsley during this month:

God has been so good to me that I must confess Christ, and we shall have greater rage now that I have come to Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly afterwards Cooper somewhat hesitatingly announced a series of discourses on the Evidences of Christianity, and so finally began a type of lecturing which was to occupy the largest part of his attention for the rest of his life.

Believing that it was his duty to leave nothing undone to counteract the evil, as he now regarded it, of his former teaching, Cooper made it a constant practice for years to allow free discussion from the floor at the close of his lecture. This was often a painful and exhausting ordeal, particularly at this time.

The absurd wrangling and ignorance of some disputants [he writes] were very wearisome, and the fierceness and intolerance of others still more distressing. I sometimes went home at eleven o'clock at night from these discussions, so completely worn down and enfevered that I thought I would give up my task.<sup>4</sup>

The effect of this constant bickering upon a person so excitable as Cooper explains, in part at least, his bad manners in later debates with more prominent opponents. He appears to have written Kingsley a little later that he had begun to use the "Socratic method" in answering hecklers. In reply Kingsley wrote:

If you are an old hand at the Socratic method you will be saved much trouble. I can quite understand young fellows kicking at it. Plato always takes care to let us see how all but the really earnest kicked at it, and flounced off in a rage \* \* \*. It seems to me \* \* \* that the danger of the Socratic method \* \* \* is this—to use it without Socrates' great *Idea*, which he expressed by "all knowledge being memory," which the later Platonists \* \* \* expressed by saying that God, or Christ, or the Word, was more or less in every man the Light which lightened him. Letting alone formal phraseology, what I mean, and what Socrates meant, was this, to confound people's notions and theories, only to bring them to look their own reason in the face, and to tell them boldly, you know these things at heart already, if you will only look at what you

<sup>3</sup> *Letters and Memories*, i: note on p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, p. 373.

know, and clear from your spirit the mists which your mere brain \* \* \* has wrapt round them. Men may be at first more angry than ever at this; they will think you accuse them of hypocrisy when you tell them "you know that I am right, and you are wrong," but it will do them good at last.<sup>5</sup>

Writing again on April 3, 1857, after Cooper had informed him that he had begun lecturing on Christianity, and made some reference to the doctrine of eternal punishment, Kingsley bade him to "go on and prosper," and stated:

On the question of future punishment, I should have a good deal to say to you. I believe that is the *crux* to most hearts.<sup>6</sup>

In a letter written from St. Leonard's on May 9, 1857, Kingsley discussed this subject *in extenso*, dividing it into eight sub-heads and covering, amongst other things, the history and origin of the doctrine of endless torment, the New Testament texts upon which it is founded, and the etymology of the Greek words ordinarily translated as "eternal."<sup>7</sup> A long postscript dealt with the doctrine of the Trinity, which Kingsley felt was supported by the discoveries of comparative anatomy. "The soundest physiologists, like Huxley," he informed Cooper, "are compelled to talk of these animals [compound polypes] in metaphysical terms just as paradoxical as, and almost identical with, those of the theologians."<sup>8</sup> In a letter written on May 20, 1857, also written from St. Leonard's, Kingsley returned to further discussion of the difficult doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>9</sup>

In September 1857 Cooper added to his duties at the Board of Health, and to his Sunday lecturing at the Hall of Science, the composition of a series of articles for *The People*, a short-lived weekly published in London by John Henderson. These were similar to the articles which he

<sup>5</sup> *Letters and Memories*, i: 330-331.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* i: 336.

<sup>7</sup> A few years before this, Maurice had been dismissed from his professorship at King's College because of his refusal to accept the doctrine of eternal punishment. His essay on "Eternal Life and Death" in *Theological Essays* [1853] formed the basis of the proceedings against him.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters and Memories*, i: 336-342. Cf. abridged edn., pp. 194-197.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* abridged edn., pp. 197-199.

had written for Douglas Jerrold, and were brought to an end, after nine months, by the discontinuance of the publication.<sup>10</sup> Cooper found that the class feeling and the belief in a class war with which the Chartist movement had begun twenty years earlier had by this time almost completely died away.

In March 1858, while visiting Sheffield to obtain material for an article on the cutlery works which he was preparing for *The People*, he delivered five lectures similar to those he was giving in London at the Hall of Science.<sup>11</sup> "Some persons," he told his audience, "talked about his not being consistent. The truest consistency was honesty, and he hoped he would never lack the moral courage to avow his real convictions."<sup>12</sup> The *Investigator* reported that the discussions after the lectures had, as usual, degenerated into a squabble. Yet the five lectures had proved so popular that after returning to London for the week-end Cooper came back to Sheffield immediately and between February 10 and 15 delivered five more lectures.

At the Hall of Science in London the weekly addresses, which continued all this year and until May of the following year, finally reached such purely theological subjects as the Atonement, Faith, Repentance, etc. At one time Cooper's opponents succeeded in establishing a boycott of his meetings, but Cooper continued despite audiences of not more than a handful of people, and eventually tired out the opposition by sheer persistence.<sup>13</sup>

It will be noticed that Cooper's final destination, enrollment with the General Baptists, and evangelization work throughout Scotland and England, was not achieved by any such abrupt transition as is indicated by the statement that "he might be said to have leaped off the Freethought plat-

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<sup>10</sup> *Life*, p. 374. I have been unable to locate any file of this periodical.

<sup>11</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, March 20, 1858.

<sup>12</sup> *Sheffield Times*, March 6, 1858.

<sup>13</sup> *Life*, p. 374. The *Investigator* continued its abuse. See issues of January and May, 1857.

form splash into a Baptist dipping pool."<sup>14</sup> According to Cooper himself, "it was not until fully two years had been devoted to hard reading and thinking that [he] could conscientiously and truly say 'I am a Christian'—even nominally."<sup>15</sup>

In March of 1858 Cooper for the first time met one of the champions of atheism in debate. This was the discussion carried on for two nights [March 21 and 22] with the twenty-five year old Charles Bradlaugh, then just coming into prominence as "Iconoclast." The question debated on the first night, Saturday, was whether such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed in the manner narrated in the Gospels. The *Investigator* was of the opinion that Cooper failed altogether to prove \* \* \* the alleged facts of the Gospel were anything more than mere legends or traditions of the churches \* \* \* [but was] happy to state that a great improvement was visible in Mr. Cooper's bearing towards his opponent. He allowed him to proceed with his opening address without any remark or interruption. The audience was a crowded one, and listened with rapt attention.<sup>16</sup>

The question debated on Sunday night was—Whether the moral teachings of the New Testament were a reliable guide to the human race.

Cooper in his reply admitted that faith could not move mountains, and that to take no thought for the morrow was impracticable. He took shelter behind mistranslations from the original Greek. Mr. Cooper during his address indulged in some sarcastic remarks upon Secularism, and noticed the present controversy between the Secular party and Mr. Holyoake \* \* \*. The meeting loudly expressed their disapprobation of the introduction of this topic, and cried shame on Mr. Cooper.<sup>17</sup>

Because of ill health, Bradlaugh declined to meet Cooper again three months later,<sup>18</sup> but six years afterwards they met again at the London Hall of Science.

<sup>14</sup> Holyoake, G. J., *Thomas Cooper Delineated as Convert and Controversialist*, London. 1861.

<sup>15</sup> *Life*, p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> *Investigator*, April 1, 1858.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, April 15, 1858.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, July 15, 1858.

Cooper lectured at Norwich from April 6th to the 9th;<sup>19</sup> at York from April 12th to the 16th;<sup>20</sup> and again at Norwich from the 26th to the 30th,<sup>21</sup> and also from May 4th to the 7th.<sup>22</sup> When Holyoake announced that he would deliver a lecture on "The Theory of Cooper's Conversion" in Norwich at the beginning of May, similar to the one he had previously delivered in Manchester on February 1, Cooper asked and obtained permission to attend; and he made no objection to what he heard.

After returning to London for his regular Sunday lecture on May 9, Cooper set off by express train on Monday with his friend Dr. Jobson for Bradford, at which place Dr. Jobson had the pastorate of a large Methodist church. The platform porter prevented the friends from taking the seats they were making for towards the front of the train. When the express was wrecked near Nuneaton, and several of the passengers in the front coaches were killed or badly hurt, Cooper felt that his life had been spared by direct divine intervention, and in gratitude he vowed that henceforth he would devote all his time to lecturing on the evidences of Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Upon the completion of the five lectures he had engaged to deliver at Bradford, he returned to London on May 15, resigned his Board of Health position, brought the Hall of Science lectures to a close, and at the end of May set out to preach and lecture in the North.

His first stop was at Sheffield, where on the first Sunday in June he again ascended a pulpit. Henceforth he preached in Baptist and Independent chapels whenever invited to do so. He was at Leeds from June 29 to July 2, and then proceeded to Newcastle. His appearance in this town was noticed by Robert Cooper's periodical in an article which reached new heights of abuse, the anonymous

<sup>19</sup> *Norfolk News*, April 10, 1858; *Norfolk Chronicle* of same date.

<sup>20</sup> *York Herald*, April 17, 1858; also *Yorkshireman* of same date.

<sup>21</sup> *Norfolk News*, May 1, 1858.

<sup>22</sup> *Norfolk News*, May 8, 1858.

<sup>23</sup> *Life*, pp. 375-378.

writer charging Cooper with hypocrisy, changing his creed for money, and, finally, insanity.<sup>24</sup>

During this year [1858] Cooper held public discussions with George Jacob Holyoake at three different places: one night at Nottingham, four at Norwich, and five at York.<sup>25</sup> "My friend," Cooper writes, "was gentle and temperate, conscientious and straightforward. I could not convince him, and he could not convince me; nor did the discussion disturb our friendship and mutual regard."<sup>26</sup> The good feeling between the two survived even Holyoake's caustic *Thomas Cooper Delineated as Convert and Controversialist, a Companion to His Missionary Wanderings*, written and published in 1861 as a three-penny pamphlet. "As Mr. Cooper himself is a 'plain speaker' even to rudeness," the writer observed at the beginning of his little work, "he ought not to object to plain speaking which, though explicit, shall not be rude." The following passages are of particular interest.

His beliefs neither ascend nor gravitate by any known law, but are like the French *gardes mobile* \* \* \* Not that these changes occur from levity of character—they are rather the struggles of an unquiet and unbalanced spirit \* \* \* He is by nature antagonistic and prone to extremes \* \* \* He has pride, ambition, sensitiveness, and courage. Stung by injustice, rudeness, or neglect, he will be drawn by these, as by the force of conviction, on to that side where he can resent wrong, or vindicate his own importance. That he will be honest at all times is quite credible—his feelings are stronger than his intellect, and serve him in place of logic. When this was said to him in the discussion at Norwich, he regarded it as disparaging to his intellect. This is not what is implied. The power of his intellect is not called in question, only the proportion it bears to the force of his feelings \* \* \*

His theological selections display both eccentricity and temerity. He must astonish cautious and experienced ministers by defending propositions which their experience has taught them long since must be given up. *A priori* and *a posteriori* arguments abandoned even by the Evangelical Alliance, Mr. Cooper galvanizes and sets into motion again \* \* \*

<sup>24</sup> *Investigator*, August 1, 1858.

<sup>25</sup> The Reverend Canons Robinson and Hey presided at the York discussion.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, pp. 382-383.

When his subject is the historical evidence of Christianity, an uneducated man rises in the meeting and offers objections. He is asked does he read Latin—can he construe his Greek Testament? If not he is put down as disqualified for criticism and driven out of court. A Latin quantity or a Greek verb are virtually made stepping stones to salvation \* \* \* Perhaps a workman quotes somebody who has written on the Christian evidences. The author he quotes is not to be absolutely relied upon. The quoter does not know it and could not verify his quotation if he did. The lecturer professes to read from the original, and alleges that he discovers a false rendering. A shout of triumph goes up—the poor unlettered man is hissed down, and Christianity is considered to be established. Perhaps, after all, the man was right, and his author was a better scholar than the lecturer; but as the lecturer proposes to read from the original, and the poor man is unable to detect his incompetence, the error of the lecturer is received with the same triumph as the truth. Not one in five hundred of all who shout know anything at all about it, and often no one in the whole meeting. \* \* \*

Christianity does not exercise any refining influence on Mr. Cooper's manner, or discipline his temper \* \* \* [He] thinks himself entitled to denounce as though he had himself the moral perfection and infallible knowledge of the hearts of others considered to be possessed by Christ \* \* \*

While Mr. Cooper was \* \* \* a freethinker and a sceptic, he was a man of good morals, of veracity, of honour [though ever irascible], and an industrious worker for the public good. No Christian can say that Secular principles made Mr. Cooper a bad man. He cannot now, in moral respects, be better than he was, and he is not half as useful to society \* \* \*

His secular knowledge is still his great attraction and best distinction. His animated digests of useful information, to which his intellectual taste inclines him, and which his good memory enables him to retail, causes him to excel among his new colleagues \* \* \* The Secular element in pulpit discourses is now the only hold the clergyman can have upon the multitude \* \* \*

We do not agree, and never did, with the indiscriminate accusation Mr. Cooper brings against the priests." It is true they are mostly bad, but many of them are men of high character, friends of liberty and humanity \* \* \* This wholesale imputation of con-

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<sup>27</sup> Cooper wrote in the "Address to the Reader" prefacing his *Collected Poetical Works* [1877]: "As for the denunciations of Priestcraft which abound in my book, I heartily avow that they have my \* \* \* deliberate approval \* \* \* I would not have one line obliterated wherein I have denounced their guilty game." Later in this preface he remarks that he never confounds "priests" with "real ministers of Christ."

scious wickedness to priests disfigures "Queen Mab" as well as the "Purgatory of Suicides." \* \* \*

We shall regret if anything we have said shall lead any person to treat Mr. Cooper with disrespect. Such persons will find that we shall not join it, or countenance it \* \* \*. His claims to regard stand on public grounds. As one of the working class, he is an ornament to his order. Considered as a self-taught man, his acquisitions are very great; and his boldness, courage, and activity as a political and secular teacher deserve grateful remembrance \* \* \*. As a "Lecturer on Christianity" his independence of tone is very praiseworthy. He does not go among the ministers as a follower, he does not cringe, or modify his sentiments to please them; he is always original in the course he takes. He adopts some of their doctrines, but for reasons of his own \* \* \*. In many quarters he undoubtedly improves religious liberality in its judgment of Free-thought advocates.

Mr. Cooper may be irascible, so was Socrates—Mr. Cooper may be dogmatic, so was Dr. Johnson \* \* \*. We do not contend that Mr. Cooper is equal to the great moralist or the great lexicographer; we only intend to suggest that any man of substantial qualities is to be judged by those [qualities] and not by his failings merely.

Caroline Fox heard Cooper lecture in the autumn of this year, and described him to E. T. Carne, on November 12, 1858, as

a square-built man, with a powerful, massive face; [who] walks up and down the platform, and talks on as if he were in a room, with extreme clearness, excellent choice of language, and good pronunciation.<sup>28</sup>

The *Investigator* in December 1858 published a further purely malicious pasquinade by the same hand which had penned the scurrilous Newcastle article.

After a brief visit with Mrs. Cooper at the end of 1858, Cooper in January again set off for Sheffield. At the end of the month he visited Northampton, where he had been very popular in Chartist times. The shoemakers for whom the town was famous turned out, he writes, in crowds too great for the chapel to hold them. I lectured on the six nights following, and they rose up and disputed, but with very

<sup>28</sup> *Memories of Old Friends, being extracts from the journals and letters of Caroline Fox \* \* \* from 1853 to 1871*—Horace N. Pym, ed. Phila. 1882, pp. 342-3

slight exceptions they manifested so much good humour and regard for their old democratic champion that I felt something like regret that I could not stay longer among them.<sup>29</sup>

At Blackburn he delivered six lectures and three sermons in seven days. On Whitsunday his boyhood friend Joseph F. Winks baptized him into the General Baptist denomination at the Friar Lane chapel in Leicester.

But it is impossible to trace his wanderings in detail further in this place. In the eight and a half years between 1858 and 1866 he preached or lectured in a large number of the counties of Wales; in every town of Scotland with a population of over two thousand; and in all the counties of England without exception. One year he even included the Channel Islands in his itineration. He reckoned that during this period he preached a total of 1,169 times, and lectured 2,204 times.<sup>30</sup> His itineraries down to 1872 may be found in the final chapters of his autobiography.

It was suggested to him when he began this work that a committee should be appointed to arrange his tours and direct his movements, but he preferred to work in absolute independence, and accordingly had invariably to make all his own arrangements with regard to lodgings, and the places where he was to speak. His lectures are preserved to a large extent in his little works on Christian Evidences, and the best of his sermons in *Plain Pulpit Talk*, and its sequel *The Atonement*.

During January and February of 1865, as shown by an old hand-bill which has been preserved, he delivered eight "discourses" to the students of Spurgeon's training school. Two of the "Bridge of History over the Gulf of Time" lectures were included in this series. Spurgeon commended Cooper's work, ignoring the fact that he did not unreservedly subscribe to the doctrine of eternal punishment.

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<sup>29</sup> *Life*, p. 384.

<sup>30</sup> *Life*, p. 388.

Two important meetings with anti-religious leaders, which are omitted from the autobiography, must now be considered. The first of these took place at St. George's Hall in Bradford, where Cooper met Joseph Barker for six nights' discussion of the belief in a personal God and in the doctrine of immortality. Each of the debaters had his own chairman, and a different umpire was appointed each night to decide irreconcilable controversies. W. E. Forster acted as umpire on the first night. Professional short-hand reporters took down the debate, which was afterwards printed in a booklet of 167 pages. The occasion presented the curious spectacle of Protestant Christianity being defended by Cooper, who until five years previously had acted as a champion of freethought, and of its being attacked by Barker<sup>31</sup> who at one time had been among the most popular and powerful members of the Dissenting clergy. Darwin was referred to by both speakers—his *Origin of Species* had been published during the previous year—but his name was so unfamiliar to the reporters and to the printer that more than half the time the published report misspells it.

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph Barker, who was slightly younger than Cooper, was born in Lancashire of poor parents. After a childhood which was familiar with want, and the obtaining of a haphazard education, young Barker became first a Methodist local preacher, and then the pastor of a New Connexion Methodist church. For some time he acted as a champion of Protestantism against freethought, but finally was himself infected with doubt, so that he became in rapid succession a Quaker, a Unitarian, and an atheist. He established several periodicals for the people, some of which reached an enormous circulation, so that he was for a time a power amongst the working class. In 1847 he went to America for a six months' lecturing tour in advocacy of freethought, and in 1851 he emigrated to this country with his family. He was driven out of the first community in which he had settled, in central Ohio, because of his anti-religious activities, and thereupon moved seventy miles further west. Even in this frontier town his extreme views caused him to be attacked, and he moved a second time into "the unpeopled territory of Nebraska, a country at that period ten or a dozen times larger than England, and yet containing less than five thousand inhabitants." Though he was a successful pioneer and farmer, his anti-Christian beliefs made him increasingly unhappy. He finally decided to return to England, and arrived there in the early part of 1860, shortly before his debate with Cooper. He was associated this year with Bradlaugh in the founding of the *National Reformer*, but quarrelled with him, and was dismissed by the shareholders. Less

The personal abuse on each side was abundant, and a debate on the existence of God and the immortality of the soul frequently degenerated into a vulgar squabble, which reached such a pitch of ill-feeling that on the fifth night Barker for a time refused to go on. Cooper interrupted continually; and uncomplimentary epithets were hurled nightly on both sides. In view of the language of the report it seems remarkable that the disputants did not fall to blows on the stage. Certainly Cooper behaved very badly; always, of course, because he felt that what his adversary said was false, or out of order, or a mis-quotation. As in his debates with Holyoake, he objected strenuously to the reading or quoting [except from memory] of any authorities, claiming that the speakers were there to explain their own thoughts, and not to present the ideas and statements of others. Barker became so wrought up that at the end of the discussion he declared, "If he [Thomas Cooper] had not told us he was an Englishman, I should have taken him for a bastard between a gypsy and a Jew."<sup>32</sup>

The second of the meetings previously referred to was Cooper's debate with Charles Bradlaugh nearly four years later. This took place at the Hall of Science in London on February 1 and 3, 1864. The questions at issue were: first, whether God existed; and, second, whether there was a moral governor of the universe. Cooper's argument for the existence of God he himself summarized as follows:

I exist. Having begun to exist, something must have existed before me. I am intelligent, personal, conscious; and so the something which has always existed is personal, conscious, intelligent. The universe and humanity, since they once were not, and then be-

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than three years after this date Barker became a Christian again. After serving for a few years as minister to small Primitive Methodist congregations, he returned to America, where he spent the rest of his life in itinerant lecturing and preaching in much the same fashion as Cooper was doing in England. He died in Omaha on September 1, 1875. See his rambling and fragmentary autobiography, *The Life of Joseph Barker Written by Himself*, which was published in 1880 by the same publishers who had brought out Cooper's autobiography eight years earlier.

<sup>32</sup> *Six Nights Discussion between Thomas Cooper and Joseph Barker*, London-Bradford [1860], p. 166.

gan to be, must have had a cause. That cause must have been intelligent, since it would have been impossible for non-intelligence to have created the universe of law and order which science reveals. My existence proceeds therefore from that uncaused, underived, un-created intelligence which I call God.

This argument for a First Cause it was not difficult for such a master of dialectic as Bradlaugh to prove utterly fallacious. Always the wielder of a rough tongue, he attempted to overwhelm Cooper with sarcasm and invective, as well as by superior logic. To repeated demands for definition of his terms Cooper paid no attention, insisting that Bradlaugh was obligated to prove the non-existence of God. Bradlaugh replied that to deny the existence of God is meaningless; what he denied was the existence of any one of the alleged beings that had been described to him in definitions of the term God. Cooper lost his temper with his opponent, scolded the audience even when it applauded him, and refused to budge from his original position.

The second discussion, on God the moral governor of the universe, was polemically also a Bradlaugh victory. Cooper's argument was based on the assumption that the person or being governing the universe must be moral, since there exists in humanity a moral nature, as proved by conscience. Bradlaugh showed no mercy in his savage onslaughts upon the "mental feebleness" of his fifty-nine year old opponent. He did not even spare Cooper the ignominy of publicly exposing his faulty pronunciation of French. The report of the discussion issued by the free-thought press<sup>33</sup> is not, in all probability, entirely accurate or fair in its transcription of Cooper's speeches; but there can be no doubt that as a debater the honors were entirely Bradlaugh's. James Thomson [B.V.—author of "The City of Dreadful Night") composed, according to Bradlaugh's

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<sup>33</sup> *Two Nights Public Discussion between Thomas Cooper and Mr. C. Bradlaugh on the Being of God as the Maker and Moral Governor of the Universe*, London, 1874.

daughter, "some amusing verse descriptive of Mr. Cooper's position as laid down by him in his opening speech."<sup>34</sup>

It is interesting to compare the derogatory remarks of the Bradlaughs—father and daughter—upon Cooper's platform powers, with those of one who agreed with his religious views. The article from which the following extracts are taken appeared originally in the London *Eclectic* in this same year, 1864, and was later reproduced in the New York periodical of the same name.

Thomas Cooper is a lecturer in a very eminent degree—we think the king of lecturers \* \* \* Utterly inartificial, perfectly \* \* \* coherent, logical, \* \* \* overflowing with \* \* \* facts of science, happy pieces of humour, rare touches of imagination \* \* \* this useful man now seeks by his eloquent and powerful and well-informed mind, and singularly felicitous and adroit tongue, in some measure to overtake and undo the mischiefs effected by him by the same means whilst walking beneath the night of scepticism \* \* \* Since his conversion to Christianity, he has principally occupied himself by delivering a course of lectures embracing a comprehensive scheme of argument in favor of the reality of religious truth. \* \* \* Mr. Cooper unfolds, through various pathways of argument, the great doctrines of design and divine intention. Commencing his first lecture with the argument of Paley, we express simple truth when we say he improves the argument by supplying several links in the chain; and the first lecture, in the course of its delivery, transforms Natural History into the interest of a fairy tale. \* \* \* The second lecture, on Design in the Celestial Spaces, compels the mind of the hearer to move with freedom and majesty; and the whole of the audience, when we formed a part of it, hung breathlessly on the story. \* \* \* 'The lecturer is so delightfully free in his system, we could almost be sure that, frequently as these lectures have been delivered, they have never been composed or written down on paper \* \* \* Mr. Cooper possesses power enough of the rhetorical order, but seems to disdain to use it unless carried along unconsciously into the center of his own power. His style is direct, familiar, colloquial, frequently very pleasantly humorous, always lucid and clear. \* \* \* We have dictated these remarks in the hope that they may be a means of introducing this excellent and honoured man to some towns and neighborhoods as yet unvisited \* \* \* Like Richard Baxter, he is compelled to say he "does no discredit to any University, since he is

<sup>34</sup> Charles Bradlaugh—*A Record of His Life and Work*, by his daughter Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, London, 1894 [two vols.] 1: 209.

not of any," and with some, colleges alone are believed to give either status or wisdom; [but] we believe it will be increasingly found, as each lecture is heard \* \* \* that for fullness and fitness, for the memory which treasures \* \* \* for the wisdom which perceives and applies, there is scarcely another teacher among us able to do the work which Providence seems to have appointed to Thomas Cooper.<sup>28</sup>

With reference to the debates considered above, Cooper wrote simply:

I had discussions in after years with big and little champions of Atheism; but their proceedings seemed to me crooked and unprincipled, and I shall therefore pass them by without even recording their names. My clear conviction is, that public discussions on the Evidences of Christianity never do any good, but often do great harm. The sceptical champion, and his friends too, generally come up to the encounter to *win* by fair means or foul; they are in too great a heat to hear the truth; it cannot get fair entrance into their minds. On the other hand, young fresh minds, unused to these inquiries, are often caught by the new and startling words they hear, and become doubters; perhaps, eventually, confirmed unbelievers.<sup>29</sup>

While Cooper had the courage and honesty to avow his convictions everywhere, and to meet his opponents face to face, temperamentally he was totally unfitted for debating; for he invariably lost his temper, and then, like many sensitive people he became unbearably rude and overbearing. The published reports of his discussions must have wrought untold harm to his cause among the very class he was trying to reach.

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<sup>28</sup> *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* [N. Y.]1xii:217-219.

<sup>29</sup> *Life*, p. 383.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HANDBOOKS ON CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES AND PUBLISHED SERMONS—PARADISE OF MAR- TYRS—COLLECTED POETICAL WORKS— THOUGHTS AT FOURSORE

During Cooper's first years as a home missionary, his wife saw him only at long and infrequent intervals. But in January 1861 she began to accompany him on his journeys, and continued to do so every summer and most of the winters for the next five years. In November 1866 she had to give up, however, and, as they had broken up their home in 1861, she took refuge with her sister Mrs. Andrews in Sheffield. Within a few weeks after her departure from his side, Cooper was prostrated by a combination of heart-attack and "brain-fever," the result of more than eight years of unremitting mental exertion. This occurred at Ramsgate. Dr. Walford of that place attended him without fee, and, Cooper was convinced, saved him from death. After a month's treatment by this skillful physician he had just sufficient strength to go on to Croydon, where one of his former pupils gave him shelter until February. Only then was he able, though still weak and ill, to rejoin Mrs. Cooper at Sheffield. At times during this illness he suffered so terribly from insomnia that he feared he would lose his mind, but several months of complete rest and quiet finally brought about his recovery. Henceforth he worked with somewhat more discretion.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Cooper continued to go out with him occasionally until 1872, when she moved to her sister's house, 2 Portland Place, Lincoln, their home thereafter until her death and his own.

This long illness had a fortunate aftermath. Cooper was still without any assured income, being entirely de-

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, pp. 388-389.

pendent upon the collections gathered at his lectures, and such donations as those who believed in his work might feel inclined to give him. W. E. Forster now proposed a public subscription for the purpose of purchasing an annuity for his old friend. Samuel Morley, M.P., proprietor of the *Daily News*, and prominent Dissenter, philanthropist, and temperance advocate, headed the list with a subscription of one hundred pounds; Charles Seely, W. E. Forster, and Mr. James Harvey each contributed fifty pounds, Dr. Jobson gave twenty, and Carlyle sent in ten. Public subscriptions raised the total to £1,300, with which an annuity of £100 was purchased from the National Debt office, payable to Cooper and his wife jointly, and after the death of either to the survivor.<sup>2</sup> As Cooper lived for another twenty-six years, the total amount he received in annuities amounted to double the sum originally paid in.

By June 1867 Cooper was again able to resume his missionary work, though thereafter he never preached more than twice on Sunday, and limited himself to three or four lectures each week.<sup>3</sup> Yet Holyoake states that in 1877, when Cooper was seventy-two, his list of appointments showed him engaged to speak in more than seventy different towns within a period of six months.<sup>4</sup>

The death of his old opponent Robert Cooper in 1868 caused a wide-spread report that it was Thomas Cooper who had died. He promptly corrected the rumor by sending the following letter to the papers:

Sir—

I see it is reported that I am dead. Lord! how these papers lie.

Yours very truly,  
Thomas Cooper<sup>5</sup>

About 1870 he gave up debating with Secularists and others at the close of his meetings, but instead invited all

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 389.

<sup>4</sup> *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church*, March, 1904.

<sup>5</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892.

who were genuinely troubled by doubt to call at his lodgings for private conference. Not more than a dozen ever came. As a result of the new policy the attendance of Secularist workingmen at the lectures dropped off.<sup>6</sup>

In 1871 publication of the lectures which he had now been delivering for about fourteen years was at last begun. The first of a series of five little octave volumes dealing with the evidences for Christianity appeared in July 1871 under the title of the *Bridge of History Over the Gulf of Time*. Designed to prove the historical existence of Jesus, and the authenticity of the gospel records, it began with an outline history of the nineteen centuries of the Christian era; these centuries being likened to a series of arches constituting a great bridge. To each arch the lecturer gave a name derived from some event, characteristic, or famous personality prominent in the century represented. Thus the nineteenth century was the Arch of Science; the eighteenth of the French Revolution; the seventeenth of Oliver Cromwell; and so on back to the second and first centuries, which he named the Arch of the Fathers, and the Arch of the Apostles. In the part of the work dealing with the first two centuries a detailed refutation of Strauss, and incidentally of Renan, was attempted. The evidence assembled shows an impressive range of reading in science, history, theology, and the work of the church fathers; and the argument is presented clearly, interestingly, and forcefully; but it is instructive to note how frequently the same evidence which was adduced in the *Critical Exegesis* to prove the mythological character of the Christ story, is now interpreted in a new way, and held triumphantly to proclaim the truth of the gospel records. That the religious-minded found help and support from these little volumes for a faith reeling under the attacks of Huxley, Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer is evident from the fact that fifty-one thousand copies of the series were printed and sold. Of this total the *Bridge of History* accounted for

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<sup>6</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 379.

twenty-five thousand—nearly half;<sup>7</sup> and fifteen thousand copies were printed within five years of the first appearance of the book.

Next to receive publication were Cooper's lectures setting forth the arguments for belief in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul, which came out in September 1873 under the title of *God, the Soul, and a Future State*. The arguments for the being of God were presented in the first part, those for man's spiritual nature and assurance of future life, in the second. Victorian interest in these questions is indicated by the fact that ten thousand copies of this little work were sold, the final edition appearing in 1892.<sup>8</sup>

The *Verity of Christ's Resurrection from the Dead* [1875] and the *Verity and Value of the Miracles of Christ* [1876], which constitute the third and fourth volumes of the Christian Evidence series, contain those lectures which dealt with the matters mentioned in their titles. That unbelief was increasing by the third quarter of the century may be deduced from the fact that these works required editions of only six thousand and five thousand copies respectively. Both were republished in 1892, the year of Cooper's death.<sup>9</sup>

*Evolution; the Stone Book; and the Mosaic Record of Creation* [1878] formed the fifth and final contribution to this series. These three lectures, designed to meet the arguments of those new opponents of orthodox religion, the scientists, contain what Cooper said to audiences at the beginning rather than at the end of his attacks on Darwinism.<sup>10</sup> Though he grieved to report that the leading men of science "make it no secret that they throw the Design Argument, or Doctrine of Final Causes, to the winds," his reply to their findings was no mere work of ignorant obscurantism. He accepted evolution as applying to the creation of the world, but rejected the theory as account-

<sup>7</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 368.

<sup>8</sup> *English Catalogue of Books*—1890-1897.

<sup>9</sup> *English Catalogue of Books*—1890-1897.

<sup>10</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 368.

ing for the origin of human life, holding that as applied to man, evolution was invalidated by the large number of "missing links," and the entire absence of fossilized human remains. He knew of the discovery of the Cro-Magnon skull, but discredited its alleged great age; and the Paleolithic flints he thought could be explained as resulting from natural forces. To account for the different narratives embodied in Genesis he offered the quaint theory that the first part of that book is a record of God's revelation to Adam, preserved by our first parent and inserted by Moses into Genesis unaltered. The seven days of creation were not, however, days of twenty-four hours, but were different geological periods—"the second day of creation may have been thousands or even millions of years." His position, in fact, was quite similar to that of Cuvier, Lyell, and Agassiz, all of whom he quotes with approval. The lecture on "The Stone Book" is an excellent simplified outline of the fundamentals of geology. Successive editions of this little work reached a total of six thousand copies. It, too, was republished in 1892.

Cooper was a child of his age in his willingness to accept the findings of the geologists and even the nebular hypothesis of LaPlace, while at the same time rejecting vehemently, because of their implications, Darwin's theories of natural selection and of the survival of the fittest.

In 1872 appeared also the *Life of Thomas Cooper Written by Himself*. In the opening pages of that work he gave the following reasons for producing it:

The world expects, and almost demands, that some men write their autobiography. It ridicules the vanity and impertinence of other men who put the recollections of their own lives into print. Hundreds of people have told me that I ought to write a record of my life. But very likely thousands will wonder that I have had the assurance to write it, or could imagine that anybody really cared to have it written. And doubtless, to many people, my record will be worthless; yet I hope others will find something in it they may deem not altogether without value \* \* \*

If the account of a man's life be worth writing at all, it must be worth writing with fair completeness. So I shall fill up the outline as fully as I judge it wise to fill it up. I shall do so more

especially when it will gratify myself. For if there be any gratification to be derived from the reading of my book, I think I ought to share it. And I most positively declare that if I had thought a share of such gratification would be denied me, I would not have written the book at all. Thus the reader will see that I have let the truth out at once; I have written the book chiefly to please myself \* \* \*

Coleridge [in his *Literaria Biographia*] thinks it "probable that all thoughts are in themselves imperishable; and that if the intelligent faculty should be rendered more comprehensive it would only require a different and apportioned organization—the body celestial instead of the body terrestrial—to bring before every human soul the collective experience of its whole past existence." One could desire to have such a power of tracing every thought to the earliest part of one's conscious existence. Not for the purpose of inflicting the recital of all one's thoughts upon others, but for the purpose of being able to tell the truth. What were the exact motives for the performance of a certain action in our lives, we often cannot state unerringly in our later years. It is not simply because memory fails that we cannot give the veritable statement; but because the moral and intellectual man has changed. We no longer think and feel as we thought and felt so many years ago; and perhaps we wonder that we did some things and spoke some words we did and spake at certain times. We are inclined to set it down that our motives then were what they would be now. We see the past, as it were, through a false glass; and cannot represent it to ourselves otherwise than as something like the present \* \* \* I shall [therefore] fail in rehearsing some things correctly, no doubt; but it shall not be wilfully, or from intention.

Most likely I shall become tedious to some readers when I am gratifying myself most fully. But any reader who is displeased with my narrative can pass over the pages in which he feels no interest; or close the book, and take to his daily broadsheet, if he prefers it."<sup>11</sup>

As the present work has endeavored to show, there are large gaps in this interesting self-history—particularly in its account of the author's connection with Chartism. The twenty year hiatus between the date of its publication and the year of Cooper's death likewise calls for the supplementary labors of a biographer. Of this work of his

<sup>11</sup> *Life*, pp. 1-3. For a condescending contemporary review of this autobiography see *Chambers Journal*, Ixix: 373 [1872]. For a longer, sympathetic review, see *London Quarterly Review* xxxviii; 445-468 [1872].

old age the total number published was forty thousand copies.<sup>12</sup>

In September of this same year [1872] seven of the discourses which Cooper had delivered from the pulpits of Baptist, Independent, and Methodist chapels throughout the kingdom were published under the title of *Plain Pulpit Talk*. A copy of the book was immediately despatched to Charles Kingsley, whose acknowledgment of the presentation was the last letter to pass between the two, as a little more than two years later the clergyman was dead.

Eversley, September 23, 1872

My dear Thomas Cooper.

I have been wandering for nearly a fortnight, the only scrap of a holiday I have had for two years, and only found your book and letter yesterday. But I have read through your *Plain Pulpit Talk* in two evenings, and I am a close and critical reader, and with delight. That a man of your genius and learning should have done the thing well does not surprise me. The delight to me is the thing you have done \* \* \*<sup>13</sup>

Though few in our day are delighted by sermons—much less by printed ones—so acceptable were these of Cooper's to his own generation that five editions were disposed of.

In 1873 the first part of the *Paradise of Martyrs*, a “faith rhyme”, dedicated to W. E. Forster and designed to offset the irreligious *Purgatory of Suicides*, made its appearance. Arthur O'Neill is said to have suggested the subject at the time the author was composing his *Prison Rhyme*, but it was not until thirty years later that the first five books—all that were ever written—were ready for publication. As stilted as the *Purgatory*, and like that work written in Spenserian stanzas, it has none of the vehemence and passion which made the earlier poem notable in spite of numerous defects. This later production is a sort of rhymed “Book of the Martyrs,” and, as before, each canto is introduced by several stanzas of personal re-

<sup>12</sup> Publisher's announcement at end of *Thoughts at Fourscore*.

<sup>13</sup> *Letters and Memories* [abridged edn.] p. 199.

flection or recollection. These are followed by visions of the martyrs in paradise, the description of heaven following the conventional pattern of Revelation, except that the martyrs are described as acting as unseen messengers of God to earthly souls struggling with doubt and discouragement. The book throughout is militantly anti-Catholic, the martyrs presented being nearly all Protestant, or those who before the Reformation rebelled against the Pope and Catholic dogma. In the first book appear Ridley and other English martyrs less well known; in the second, the martyred apostles, together with such figures as Paul, Isiah, Able, Polycarp, and others. Their theme is the future conversion of the Jews. Near the end of the canto, and of each canto thereafter, a hand of golden light appears in the heavens, and in obedience to this sign the martyrs march in serried ranks up the easy ascent of a terraced mountain to the heights of paradise, where the dreamer cannot follow. The third book introduces additional martyrs of England, including not only the early missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons, but also those persecuted as schismatics in New England. The heathen, we are told, are in this other-world permitted "a second scene of trial." Book Four presents the martyrs of France—particularly those of Montpelier and the Vaudois. The last book, into which is introduced an impassioned eulogy of Mazzini, deals with Savonarola and other papal victims; the ancient popes being included, however, among the Italian martyrs. The martyrology of Germany, of the Netherlands, of Spain and of other countries was to have formed the subject of a projected Part II, which never advanced beyond this schematization.

The preface to this poem reveals that its publication was largely in compliance with the repeated urgings of religious friends, the author himself feeling some misgivings as to its worth.

At sixty-eight [he wrote] one ceases to be sanguine, if not to care about literary success. I quite expect that the critics will cry out, "What tame stuff is this compared with the *Purgatory!*" It

is the fruit, not of a mind struggling with doubt in a gloomy prison; but of a heart, thank God! throbbing with gratitude to Him for restoration to Christian faith and Christian life, and daily intent on spreading that faith and life in the hearts of others.<sup>14</sup>

The collected *Poetical Works of Thomas Cooper*, made up of the two long pieces and a brief selection of minor poems<sup>15</sup> appeared in 1877, four years later. The shorter poems were described as samples of an article which he could have supplied in great plenty had he not believed that the world already possessed quite enough minor poetry. A second edition of the *Poetical Works* was issued nine years later, in 1886.

*Old Fashioned Stories*, a re-publication [with additions]<sup>16</sup> in one volume of the two volume *Wise Saws and Modern Instances* [1845] came out in 1874. It went through three editions, the last dated 1880.

In 1880 also, a second collection of Cooper's sermons to working-men was published under the title of the *Atonement, and Other Discourse, Being a Second Series of Plain Pulpit Talk*. Only one edition of this work was printed.

The final catalogue of his literary labors, Cooper confessed, was something very different from what he had dreamed it would be in his youth, but he comforted himself with the hope that it might contain some things which would do good to some of his fellow-men.<sup>17</sup>

In 1885 his final publication, *Thoughts at Fourscore, and Earlier*, made its appearance. It consists principally of lectures, sermons, and reminiscences, being correctly described on the title-page as a "medley." Although writ-

<sup>14</sup> Preface, *Paradise of Martyrs*.

<sup>15</sup> The minor poems comprise: Section II—"The Smaller Prison Rhymes" [three Chartist pieces; and from the *Baron's Yule Feast* the Woodman's Song and the Old Man's Song]; and Section IV—"Early Pieces" [two love poems, four pieces from the *Baron's Yule Feast*, and "To Lincoln Cathedral."].

<sup>16</sup> These were four additional stories of Lincolnshire as Cooper knew it in his youth, originally contributed to *Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and the *Northern Tribune*.

<sup>17</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 370.

ten more than fifty years ago, the following lines from the two chapters upon strikes and the vicissitudes of trade, read as though penned during the present decade:

Nor let anyone imagine that [America's] condition is any better than our own. Wages have been reduced in the States ten, twenty, and even more per cent in some instances \* \* \* Working men [are] leaving America by shoals; \* \* \* from two hundred to three hundred stonemasons have returned to one district in Scotland. The American iron firms are sharing disaster with those of England, for the farmers in the Mississippi cannot sell their wheat at remunerating prices, and being, besides, heavily burthened with mortgages, cannot buy machinery \* \* \* One hundred thousand men are unemployed in New York.

Every man of reflection knows what is the root-evil—the primary cause—of all this distress, which, periodically, but most surely, affects the nations. WAR—demon War—hellish War—is that root-evil—that primary cause.<sup>18</sup>

In his chapter on “Charles Darwin; and the Fallacies of Evolution” Cooper pays sincere homage to Darwin’s character and scientific attainments, but points out that although Mr. Darwin never expressed himself piously, or even reverently \* \* \* he uses the term “Creator” several times. That term is the only one by which Mr. Darwin indicates that he had some kind of a belief in the Eternal Author of all things.<sup>19</sup>

After lecturing on Darwin at Beverley, in Yorkshire, he had received the following note:

The Vicarage, Beverley \* \* \* September 19, 1882

My dear Sir—

I heard your lecture last night with pleasure; and beg to inform you that, five weeks ago, I sent a letter to Mr. Darwin’s son, addressed to my uncle, the late Professor Eadie, from his father.—in which he says he can with confidence look to Calvary \* \* \*

Robert Eadie, F. R. G. S.<sup>20</sup>

Cooper commented:

I do not know when Charles Darwin told Professor Eadie that “he could with confidence look to Calvary”—or what he really meant by it. We were told some time ago that young Mr. Darwin is now trying to collect his father’s letters, that he may publish them. Of course he will insert the letter to the late Professor Eadie. Let us hope we shall have some explanation of it.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 139. This letter does not appear in any volume of Darwin’s correspondence which I have seen.

The question of date is, as Cooper recognized, of the utmost importance, for if the letter were written while Darwin was a student at Cambridge or Edinburgh it would not mean a great deal, particularly if it was composed after he had abandoned medicine and was thinking of preparing for the church. Elsewhere in *Thoughts at Fourscore*, Cooper relates that Darwin was so impressed by the civilizing influence of Christian missionaries upon the barbarous natives of Terra del Fuego, whom Darwin had seen when the "Beagle" visited that spot in 1832, that he contributed regularly to the South American Missionary Society.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of its heterogeneous contents Cooper's last book, which cannot be considered at further length here, is not without interest. It ended with a vigorous appeal for the formation of a band of young men from the universities and preparatory schools to take up the defence of religion. He had earlier recommended that they should adopt the following program:

Let all come in to hear you, free. Sell no tickets, take no monies for admission, have no practice that may leave a hair-breadth's room for Christ's enemies to charge you with selfishness. Have a collection at the end of your discourse on the ground that you cannot live on the air, and pay expenses of lodging and traveling, and printing, from an empty pocket.<sup>23</sup>

This was the practice which Cooper himself followed to the very end of his life, sufficient proof of the sincerity of his convictions.

It was during the quarter of a century of peripatetic preaching and lecturing that Cooper grew the throat beard and adopted the high-cut waistcoat which distinguish most of the existing portraits. Except for the 1848 woodcut first published in *Howitt's Journal* and reproduced in the later editions of Gammage's *History of the Chartist Movement*, engravings and photographs show Cooper as he

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324-327.

<sup>23</sup> *Life*, p. 399.

appeared at the age of sixty-five or eighty. The early portrait shows him as a smooth-shaven young man with high forehead and long hair reaching to his coat collar; the others as an elderly preacher after he had allowed his hair to grow even longer, and though otherwise smooth-shaven with a beard under his chin to protect his throat, a sensible precaution for an old man racked by bronchitis who had to speak in chapels whose interior in winter was sometimes icy. The air of benignity and calm which distinguishes these latter portraits is apt to give a false impression of the man as he was in his years of vigor, and probably explains D. A. Wilson's misleading reference to him as "gentle Thomas Cooper."<sup>24</sup>

Of those still living who heard Cooper's later lectures, one wrote in 1930.

There came pretty regularly to the chapel of my boyhood the Christian lecturer, Thomas Cooper \* \* \*. He was an elderly man as I remember him, with a waistcoat that buttoned right up to the neck. He had abundance of long hair and side whiskers, and was deeply marked by smallpox. As a boy I was always glad to go to hear him, for his lectures were very clear, and full of things I did not know.<sup>25</sup>

Professor John W. Cunliffe in his teens also heard Cooper lecture, and vividly remembers his reading of the first chapter of Genesis in Hebrew.

The well-known English writer on musical and scientific subjects, Mr. J. W. N. Sullivan, has recorded in an autobiographical volume recently published:

Amongst my father's books were some by the old Chartist Thomas Cooper. I remember perfectly the title of two of these—*God, the Soul, and a Future State*, and *The Bridge of History over the Gulf of Time*. I had been four or five years at school when I discovered these books, and I read them with extraordinary interest. The first in particular fascinated me. I have no clear re-

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, D. A., *Carlyle on Cromwell and Others*, p. 346.

<sup>25</sup> *The Witness* [Monthly magazine of Trinity Road Chapel, London]. Presumably this unsigned article was written by the editor, the Reverend Henry Oakley.

collection of its contents, and it was doubtless extremely sketchy in its reasoning. But it was the first occasion on which I had made contact with anything that could be called abstract speculation.<sup>25</sup>

In the historical pageant held at Stoke-on-Trent in May 1930, in celebration of the Wedgwood bicentenary, the Labour M.P. from Burslem appeared as Thomas Cooper, an indication that his memory still survives in the Five Towns.

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<sup>25</sup> Sullivan, J. W. N., *But for the Grace of God*, N. Y., 1932, pp. 25-26.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE DEATH OF MRS. COOPER

In spite of almost continuous invalidism during the forty-six years of her married life, Mrs. Cooper attained the ripe age of seventy-eight—almost of seventy-nine. Her death occurred in February 1880,<sup>1</sup> after a long period of such intense suffering that death came as a relief.

Although the autumn of 1879 found her so seriously ill as to be wholly confined to her bed, the necessity of earning something to eke out the meager Debt Office annuity of one hundred pounds—actually only £98-8-4 after deductions for income tax, document stamps, etc.—compelled Cooper, who was now in his seventy-fifth year, to go out as usual on a lecturing and preaching tour. His recompense for such work was merely the collections taken up after the lecture, out of which he had often to pay both rent and printing expense, plus small sums obtained from the sale of his books when the meeting was over.

The fortitude with which he bore the hardships of such work in mid-winter, and the courage with which Mrs. Cooper endured her almost constant suffering are attested by the last letters which passed between them, written during his absence at the end of 1879.<sup>2</sup> During his nine weeks' tour Cooper wrote to his wife daily. To make sure of her replies reaching him enroute, he enclosed always a self-addressed envelope. After November 6 Mrs. Cooper was no longer able to write, and the office of amanuensis was assumed by her widowed sister Mrs. Sarah Brown. Except where otherwise noted the extracts

<sup>1</sup> In *Thoughts at Fourscore* [p. 370] Cooper has made the curious error of giving this date as 1870.

<sup>2</sup> Entrusted to me by Alfred Ash, Cooper's servant from 1880 to 1892.

from this record of enduring affection and Christian piety are from letters by Cooper.

Moat Bank, Burton-on-Trent.  
Monday, October 13, 1879.

Dearest Love:

\* \* \* I enclose you Jobson's letter. His cheque for £8-19-2 I have sent to my publishers. What an infamous thief's tax it seems to take £2-1-8 a year from our little £100—five-pence in the pound Income Tax. So much for *War*—which means Murder and Robbery by Wholesale \* \* \*

Moat Bank, Burton-on-Trent.  
Tuesday, October 14, 1879.

My own dearest—

We had a crowded house last night—the vicar of Burton in the chair—and £7 was the collection. My good host<sup>3</sup> has given me £5 now instead of at Xmas. "For," says he, "I may die before Xmas." Yet he does not seem likely to die—for he is up this morning and looks well. But he is soon knocked down again \* \* \*

Mr. Bass is as pleasant as ever—but more irritable; and I have to *mind* and *not* raise his temper.

[From Mrs. Cooper]

2 Portland Place,  
St. Mary's Street,  
Lincoln.  
October 14, 1879

My dearest Love—

Thank you very much for the pleasant good report you have been able to send me from Burton. It would be cheery if I could send you as good in return, but the symptoms are not quite so good \* \* \* I have a pleasant letter from America and a card from Oxford to enclose \* \* \*

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

Moat Bank, October 15, 1879

Sweetest—

Glad to see your hand-writing, but fear you have given yourself pain \* \* \* We had another full hall last night—but I was so busy in answering people who crowded around me, that I forgot to ask what the collection was. I sold three pounds worth of books.

<sup>3</sup>This was Mr. Abram Bass. He and his brother Michael Bass [Liberal M. P. from 1848 to 1883] contributed substantially to the Cooper annuity fund in 1866. Both were members of the famous brewing firm.

I meant to go down to the town to hear Lutteridge tonight—but I shall *not*: the toil is so great that I shall be glad to rest \* \* \*

My publishers have sent me their receipt for Jobson's cheque, so I am clear *there*.

Moat Bank, Thursday Noon, Oct. 16, 1879

My precious Love—

I have been out in the fine sun and air an hour and a half with my host—thinking often I shall see him no more \* \* \* Memory fails Mr. Bass in common things: that is to say he does *not* forget them—but says them over and over again and forgets that he has said them but an hour before! His memory of passages of poetry from Shakespear, Byron, etc. is as wonderful as ever \* \* \*

I have not a single letter from anybody this morning. If some of my correspondents do *not* reply to me at Worcester I must write to them again. Being ministers chiefly, I expect they are away from home at the Baptist and Congregational Yearly Meetings \* \* \*

Worcester, Friday, October 17, 1879

Dearest and Best—

I enclose you thirty-four pounds \* \* \* The collections [at Burton-on-Trent] amounted to twenty pounds. They paid *all* expenses of printing and the hall, and Mr. Bass paid for the cabs \* \* \* I reserve a sovereign and a few shillings for myself. I sold a good many books last night, and am sending for another book parcel.

My lodgings would be pleasanter if I had not to go up two stories to sleep. I shall be glad to be alone and quiet \* \* \*

[From Mrs. Cooper]

Lincoln, October 18, 1879

My dearest Love—

I very thankfully acknowledge the receipt of P. O. orders and bank notes to the amount of thirty-four pounds, and will attend to your directions therein as soon as practicable.

I am glad that you are safe landed in a tolerably comfortable abode, and can have some desirable quiet. \* \* \*

I had a better day yesterday, less pain and took food better, and the doctor gave hope of more permanent relief \* \* \*

One week of absence past this day, one week nearer your return if we are both spared \* \* \*

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

Worcester, Saturday, October 18, 1879

Sweetest—

\* \* \* Wightman, the sceptic who wrote me those bad secret letters the last time I was here, has written to the Independent min-

ister and tried to poison his mind against me. I have heard the letters read: they are very malevolent. I have never had any transactions with him. He *was* a Baptist once years ago, and as he is an Atheist now, he is merely serving his bad Master. My life, thank God! is upright, and I have nothing to fear. I must pray for him and forgive him \* \* \*

Worcester, Tuesday forenoon, 21 October, 1879

My precious Love—

Four pounds collections and sold one pound eight shillings worth of books last night. Lewitt was there. He is now the Baptist minister here. He was a boy at the Town Clerk's, when we were in Leicester. He is to call on me today and go with me to the Cathedral—for I should like to lay my hand *again* on the tomb of King John as well as to see the new monuments \* \* \*

What trouble Cook and Ann have with *their* children!—what difficulty Harry and his wife must feel to bring up *their* children—and Rose seems to be lost and bewildered as to what *he* is to do with *his* children! What a blessing, darling, it is that we have *none*. Yet how happy Jane Hancock is in *her* children. Such is the difference between *good* and wise training of children, and *bad* training, or *no training at all* \* \* \* between a lone widow's \* \* \* constant trust in God—and the worldliness and strife to get money of Cook and Rose \* \* \*

Tewkesbury, Friday afternoon, 24 October, 1879

My own dearest—

I am opposite the old lodgings—but *not* in such pleasant rooms as *we* had twice.

I did not tell you how much I endured, during the week, from Wightman's malignity—nor can I tell you now. The worst of it is that two good men [the Independent minister] Mr. March and my old Leicester and Scarbro' friend Lewitt, [the Baptist minister] are now drawn into the persecution. He has turned his wickedness upon them; and may continue to annoy them. The effort to throw it all off, and go on with my work as if nothing had occurred, made me feel the recoil yesterday, and I was glad when I got to bed at night and chloral gave me relief in sleep. I cannot fully throw off the sadness yet, but the quiet of old Tewkesbury, and the rest of another night, may relieve me \* \* \* I must not think more about him—but pray for God to turn his heart. God help me so to do \* \* \*

Tewkesbury, Saturday morning, 25 October, 1879.

Darling Dove—

\* \* \* I mean to get out and see the grand "restoration" of the old Abbey Church, and look at the old gabled houses. I cannot ven-

ture into the "sweet plains" that you speak of, Dearest—where we have gotten so many beloved flowers.<sup>4</sup>

[From Mrs. Cooper]

Lincoln Oct. 25/79

My very dear Lover—

I am deeply sorry to read such a sad story of your Worcester visit \* \* \* I am thankful to tell you that I have obtained some considerable relief, but it has been hard work and severe suffering. I hope the worst is past, and I am so thankful you were not here to witness the [illegible] pain.

Your trouble has caused you to forget to send an envelope \* \* \* We are peaceful and comfortable, thank God. May he bless you, prays,

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

Tewkesbury, Saturday night, 25 October, 1879

My precious Love—

\* \* \* I am warm and quiet: two very good recommendations of a lodging. But my cook is a bad one, and she has other imperfect qualities—so that I have again something to endure. And so it will be, I doubt not, to the end of the earth \* \* \*

As the chapel is smaller than the one at Worcester, I shall not need much exertion. Yet I must not sink into listlessness on that account. If I cannot talk to do good, I might as well be silent \* \* \* I expect small collections and small book-sales, but I cannot always expect to do as well as I did at Burton-on-Trent \* \* \* I must be thankful for the past, and trustful for the future.

I wish I could ease your pain, my dearest and best. I pray the Lord to give you ease. Amen.

Sunday at noon

Have had a small company as usual, at the Baptist chapel, and the children have been so unruly that I have had to speak to them—always in gentleness—three times! They do not seem to have half the number of teachers they need \* \* \*

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<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Cooper began to travel with him in 1861. "From that time to the present," he wrote in 1872, "she has often been my winter companion, and has always been with me in summer. And through deep love of the pursuit, as well as to preserve health we have taken advantage of our wide wanderings over England, Scotland, and Wales, to gather wild-flowers everywhere." *Life*, pp. 378-379.

Tewkesbury, Monday forenoon, 27 October, 1879

My own dearest—

\* \* \* I heard a smart crier in the street this morning, and looked out and saw that he had the Corporation badge. So I must employ him for the three nights. It may serve to bring some who, otherwise, might not come \* \* \*

Tewkesbury, Tuesday forenoon, 28 October, 1879

Darling—

Only one pound fifteen shillings collection and seven and six for books last night \* \* \* Next Sunday I expect to sit and hear two sermons from Dr. Stoughton. They had engaged him for the Gloucester Independent Chapel, without thinking of me. I am welcome to the chapel for the lectures, they assure me. So I hope all will go well. I wish I *may* be permitted to sit and hear. It will be a treat I have not had for many a long day. Some busy-body, I fear, will devise something: will be for sending me off somewhere \* \* \* If anybody devises employment for me that I know I cannot undertake I shall *not* undertake it \* \* \*

Tewkesbury, Wednesday afternoon, 29 October, 1879  
My own sweetest and dearest—

My soul cries to the Lord for help for *you* and help for myself. The pain that you have passed through I cannot *know*—but I seemed to have a feeling about me all yesterday and in the last night, that you were undergoing a great trial. The hours of today, since I received your letter this morning, I cannot describe. I seem to be all ear—lest a telegram should be brought—tell me you are dead. I cry still to God to help you, my precious love. I cannot say more \* \* \* I must pray on.

[From Mrs. Cooper]

Lincoln, Oct. 29/79

Dearest,

Just a line to say that I am no worse \* \* \* Do take care to keep off the bronchitis, Darling \* \* \*

Six P. M.

I have been hoping the doctor would call, but he comes not yet. I can give you no more particular account. Will to Gloucester tomorrow. Excuse more, Best Beloved, 'tis difficult for me to write \* \* \*

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

Tewkesbury, Thursday forenoon, 30 October, 1879

My own darling—

I would it were only seven hours, instead of seven weeks, from today that I am fixed to be with you.

It was *some* consolation to read the first words of your letter, "Just a line to say I am no worse." That will relieve me so far, that I will not be on pins and needles all today, in the fear of receiving a telegram from Lincoln \* \* \*

Afternoon

*Very, very* cold—but I must go out again to put this letter into the Post Office, and to see about the *bus* fetching me in the morning \* \* \*

[From Mrs. Cooper]

Lincoln, Oct. 30/79

My dearest Love,

Nay, my Darling, listen not for a telegram whilst I can write a word to you. I do suffer at times, and the frame shrinks, but I sleep a good deal, and I do not look for a very sudden removal. Some one will be sure to tell you if danger approaches. Yes, pray on my love. The Lord is good, I feel it every day. I hope you have not left yourself short of money, Dearest. I have been sleeping whilst the light is gone.

Your loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

Gloucester, Friday afternoon, 31 October, 1879

Dearest and Best,

\* \* \* Never trouble about money. I have seven pounds in my pocket \* \* \* I enclose two more envelopes, but remember, my precious love, if you write five words just to tell me how you are, it will be enough \* \* \*

[From Mrs. Cooper

Her last letter but one. The omitted words indicate how much physical pain and weakness had to be overcome to pen it; and the trembling, nearly illegible writing show how much she was suffering at the time of its composition.]

Lincoln, Nov. 1/79

My precious Love,

Thank you for all your precious words come to me this morning. I cannot write many [lines] but the Dr. has kindly offered to write for me to-day or to-morrow.

I have still much pain and weakness increases so I think the end may be [near]. Will it [not] be better to think of me with the blessed Saviour where there shall be no more pain and sin—where we shall worship the Lamb forever and ever. I would gladly live a little longer for you my best beloved but the meeting will not be long delayed.

May the Lord be your comfort and strength, prays,

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna Cooper

23, Brunswick Square, Gloucester  
Saturday afternoon, 1 November, 1879

My own dearest,

Even the little bit of writing from Sister Sarah is better than nothing. Do not write yourself, darling, to give yourself pain: let Sarah write instead \* \* \* I have a very pleasant large sitting-room here, looking into a large, quiet square, such a lodging as you would have liked, sweetest \* \* \*

God help you in your struggles with pain, my very precious one, and give you power to keep hold of Him \* \* \*

Gloucester, Sunday afternoon, 2 November, 1879

My own dearest,

Your precious letter reads, to me, as if you thought it would be your last. If it be, I will fasten it in my Book of Psalms, that I may have it before me every day as long as I live, to remind me that I am to rejoin you in Heaven \* \* \*

I heard Dr. Stoughton preach this forenoon \* \* \* It was an instructive sermon, and sound in doctrine: delivered with ease and clearness, and often with force \* \* \*

Gloucester, Monday noon, 3 Nov. 1879

My own darling,

Dr. Lowe has soothed my nerves a *little* by telling me he sees no *immediate danger*. But he also tells me that you have been getting weaker and thinner since I left Lincoln, and that you have suffered a good deal with wonderful patience. He assures me that if any "grave change" occurs he will tell me *at once*.

All these kind assurances of the doctor only assure me that I shall lose you soon. God help me to bear the loss—and help you, sweetest, to bear your suffering \* \* \*

Gloucester, Tuesday, 4 Nov. 1879  
Darling,

Sister Sarah's nice letter, this morning, assures me that they hope there is some little improvement in you—and this relieves me greatly.

Three pounds collection last night, and I sold thirty shillings worth of books. I succeeded much better here three years ago—but they are without a minister \* \* \*

It is raw and foggy this forenoon—but I must face it, for I have to send the £1 to Hull this morning \* \* \*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This was a fortnightly allowance to his half-sister, Mrs. John Anderson of Hull, which as his other letters show he was regularly forwarding at this time. In his first letter to his wife [October 13, 1897] he wrote regarding an obligation left by his sister-in-law Mrs. Swan, then only a few weeks dead,—"Keep what I am going to tell you secret. I foresee that I shall have to pay Spencer the £30 that [Letitia] borrowed. He must not lose it. But say nothing about it at present. It will give me no uneasiness."

Gloucester, Wednesday forenoon, 5 November, 1879

My own Dearest,

\* \* \* Though it is cold, as I have finished all my letters, I am off to see the Cathedral \* \* \*

I have also a sorrowful letter from poor George Smith's widow, telling me of her sorrows. She has been gathering potatoes at a shilling per day. But they are all gathered, and she has the *lang* Scotch winter to pull through. I can ill afford it, but I am sending her 10/-

[From Mrs. Cooper

Her last letter. Written on one sheet, with hand too weak to lift the pen between the words—the lines staggering across the paper. The uncertain writing is evidence of just sufficient strength to hold the pen. The letter is without date, but has been endorsed "Nov. 6, 1879" in Cooper's handwriting. It is impossible to reproduce in type the pathetic appearance of the original, the last loving communication of a dying woman.]

Dearest & Best

Accept my most loving [thanks?] for all your loving words and deeds. You'r[e] ever before me I bless God for his marvelous goodness in thus providing for m[y] comfort & happiness. The Lord bless you prays

Your ever loving wife,  
Susanna

Gloucester, Thursday, 6 Nov. 1879

Dearest and Best,

Three pounds, nine shillings collection last night and sold three pounds worth of books \* \* \*

I saw more of the beautiful cathedral here yesterday, and entered more thoroughly into the variety of its architectural beauty than ever I have done before \* \* \*

I must now be packing for Bristol and try to get some sleep after dinner—for I was nearly sleepless last night, having taken no chloral. I only take it on alternate nights now. I am very glad that you can sleep darling, but am distressed to learn that you still suffer great pain \* \* \*

Bristol, Friday afternoon, 7 Nov. 1879

My precious Love,

It is gladdening to me that Sister Sarah can *again* tell me of some amendment. I could like to have a letter in your own hand, darling, but am well content to have a few lines daily from Sister Sarah instead—lest it should put you to pain. Do *not* try to write, yet, till you are a little better able \* \* \*

When I get done *here* I shall have got through half of my journey, and shall be nearer to you, darling, when I get to London, next Friday \* \* \*

I have been two nights without chloral—but I *must* take some tonight. How wondrous it is that I sleep so very little, and yet I am so well! Thank God for it! \* \* \*

Bristol, Saturday forenoon, 8 Nov. 1879

My own precious Love,

I have received your own little scrawl and Sister Sarah's kind letter, and am glad she can report *again* a little improvement. But do not distress your dear self in attempts to write. I beg of you darling, *not* to do it, until you can write without pain.

Nicholls is to call in another half-hour or so, and we are to take a cab and go look at the *four* Free Libraries they have now in Bristol. I want much to see them.

The general nature of these letters having now been indicated, the rest will be presented in more summary quotation. On November 10 Cooper wrote from Bristol:

I am about to draw out a plan \* \* \* for the first quarter of 1880. As I have got the appointments *fixed* for that quarter I think it will be better to print it. I begin to be tired of longer plans—for people are unwilling to make arrangements with me for *long* periods \* \* \*

Alarmed by Mrs. Cooper's condition, at the conclusion of his Bristol engagement he hurried to Lincoln so that he might spend one day with his dying wife before going to London to keep his engagements there. He had to cut his Bristol appointments one day short to do this. His lodgings in London were at 26 Colbrook Row, Islington, from which he wrote to Mrs. Cooper on the day of his arrival: "My landlady had got fires in both rooms, and I am glad of it, for this bronchitis plagues me, and I shall need warmth." On November 18 he observed, "If I were strong and well, I should be marching off to the Museum, etc.—but am too old now, and cannot." The following day he wrote Mrs. Cooper:

I had not a great many to hear me last night; only two pounds six shillings collection and sold two pounds worth of books: very different from good Mr. Noel's time, fourteen years ago \* \* \*

My publishers<sup>6</sup> have just printed a new edition of "Plain Pulpit Talk," and they are going to press with the twentieth thousand of the "Bridge of History." \* \* \*

His letter of the day following, November 20, reported sorrowfully, "We had fewer people last night; it was very poor encouragement to come to talk to Londoners."

In a letter written from London just before his departure for Braintree on November 22, he observed:

I am thinking that this may not only be the last letter, sweetest, that I may ever write you from London—but the last letter I may ever write from London. I may never see the great city again \* \* \* The charm of visiting it is not what it was.

He did speak again in London, however, for there is record of his having preached at the old chapel in Falcon Square, Aldersgate Street, on September 20, 1885, both morning and evening, in spite of his eighty years.<sup>7</sup>

The last of three letters written to Mrs. Cooper on November 22, began:

My dearest and best,

Do not grieve because you cannot write with your own hand. I devoutly hope that you will live for me to see and talk with you again. \* \* \* We have a very keen frost and a wide prospect of snow. I preached \* \* \* this morning in the Baptist Chapel where I preached twenty years ago. Tonight I am to be in the Independent Chapel. I shall go in a cab, for bronchitis bothers me a good deal; and I do not want to make it worse. I am taking every precaution lest it should do so.

From Braintree he wrote again three days later:

My dearest Love,

Do not be troubled because I have 'such a burthen to bear,' as thou sayest. I wish thou wert better, and could live on to the end of my life, that we might die together, according to our early prayer. Mrs. Halcos makes me smile when she says she has heard of my trouble, that my dear wife was about to enter glory! How can that give me trouble? I wish that we might both enter glory now. But as that is not the will of our blessed Lord, we must wait.

<sup>6</sup> Hodder & Stoughton, who published all his books [twelve in number] after he abandoned novel writing in 1856.

<sup>7</sup> *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*, March, 1904.

*I am in trouble because thou hast to endure pain and suffering \* \* \* Tomorrow three weeks \* \* \* I am to reach Lincoln-- my work for this year being ended \* \* \**

On November 28 Cooper moved on to Colchester, from which place he wrote:

How often I think of what I shall feel if you die. I shall have no one left to whom I can speak heart to heart—to whom I shall have to write my daily letter, and tell how I fare, and how I feel and think—to whom my life will be as precious as her own. What a lonely feeling it will be! \* \* \*

I do not know how I shall fare here at Colchester. Braintree turned out very poorly—but then the weather was so greatly against us that I could not wonder.

On December 3 he wrote:

I learn that Roebuck is dead—the M. P. for Sheffield, and Waddy is the new candidate! So Sheffield will be *hot* with political excitement, as cold as it is. Roebuck was old and infirm. He was once a Chartist and died a Tory! Good luck!

He had now only two more weeks of lecture engagements, one at Norwich and one at Wisbech. To Mrs. Cooper he wrote from Norwich on December 5:

If I can only keep at my work till I get through at Wisbech I don't care. I can rest when I get to you, darling. Though I do not expect to be really free from bronchitis during the winter—unless an extraordinarily mild change of weather should come—and that no one seems to expect.

On December 9 he wrote from Norwich, “I had more people to hear me last night than I expected, and was thankful for £3-12-0 collection—although it was *not* like a Norwich collection.” The following day he advised:

I had an eccentric chairman last night—a good man—Sewell, Manager of Gurney's Bank. But he wanted to talk so long, that I was compelled to bring him to a finish as quietly as possible. He was *not* offended; but left a sovereign in the box. I wish I could get rid of the absurdity of having chairmen. But some want them for fuss, and others for their money—and I cannot easily prevent it.

His first letter from Wisbech was dated December 12:

Have had a fine journey—for I like to see the snow, and I have kept out of draughts. I am in a snug little lodging—but all is new and clean, and I am likely to be comfortable for the short stay I have to make—only six days.

All the letters now count the days until his return. How much of a strain he was placing on his own physical powers is indicated by his last two letters. The first is dated Monday, December 15:

Before I could conclude my sermon yesterday morning, the cramp seized my right side, as if it would draw all the body into one, owing to a sudden chill of the liver, arising from cold. I kept my great-coat on at night to read the Lesson, to pray, etc. and only took it off to preach, and then put it on again. I should not like to have to preach in that chapel again.

His last letter was written on Tuesday afternoon, December 16, 1879:

Darling Dove,

Now it is only the day after tomorrow! I was bothered with diarrhea yesterday and with congestion of the liver and did not get right again until this morning after a good hearty sleep. I shall be glad indeed to get out of the exposure to cold and get settled in a warm home, dearest. You cannot be more desirous of it than I am. From the tone of Sister Sarah's letter today, I expect to find you better and better.

It is very foggy and thick here today, and will cause some to keep indoors tonight who might otherwise have been at the lecture, so that the few will be fewer still.

I think I shall have a long overcoat made when I get to Lincoln, on purpose to keep me from getting cold when preaching and lecturing, the places are often so cold. I have often thought of it; but the present severe winter has made me think *more* of it \* \* \*

Six weeks later Mrs. Cooper was dead; from cancer of the womb or bladder, Mrs. Ash believed, arising from her early miscarriage.<sup>8</sup> "She had been my gentle, loving, and intelligent life-companion," Cooper wrote after her death, but "the sight and hearing of the intense suffering she endured during the latter part of her life—together with her own desire to depart and be with Christ—reconciled me to her death."<sup>9</sup> She was buried in the cemetery which is located in the southern part of Lincoln in the

<sup>8</sup> Her sister, Mrs. Letitia Swan, had died seven months earlier from cancer of the stomach.

<sup>9</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 370.

same plot where her sister Letitia had been buried seven months before, and where Cooper himself eventually joined them.<sup>10</sup>

Henceforth Cooper lived alone, with his faithful servants Mr. and Mrs. Ash, in the house at 2, Portland Place, overlooking the Lincoln station of the Great Northern Railway. This house had originally been leased by Mrs. Cooper's sister, Letitia Swan, a straw-bonnet maker and widow, who took in lodgers. When, about 1872, Mrs. Cooper was no longer able to travel with her husband, she came to live with this sister [with whom their eldest unmarried sister was also staying] in the house where seven years later they were both to die.

The servant Sarah Jane Haynes [afterwards Mrs. Ash] first came to Mrs. Swan at the age of twelve, and her mistress taught her to read, from the Bible. Except for an absence of two years, she was with Mrs. Swan for the next fourteen years continuously, and after that for another seven years, during which the Coopers and Miss Challoner, who was a seamstress, lived with Mrs. Swan. She did not marry until eight months after the death of her mistress—one month after the death of Mrs. Cooper. After the removal of Miss Challoner to her sister in Sheffield, Cooper persuaded "Janey" to remain in his service, together with her husband. Their devoted care of him did much to make his last years easier.

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<sup>10</sup> Their joint headstone [erected by Cooper before his own death] bears the following inscription: "In Memory of Susanna, the Beloved Wife of Thomas Cooper [Author of 'the Purgatory of Suicides' and Lecturer in Defence of Christianity]. She was born 7 April, 1801 and died 1 Feb., 1880. Also in Memory of her sister Letitia, the wife of Wm. Swan. She was born 23 June, 1804 and died 19 August, 1879. Also of the above Thomas Cooper who died July, 1892 aged 87 years."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE CIVIL LIST GRANTS—COOPER'S DEATH

The year following Mrs. Cooper's death, with indomitable spirit Cooper once more made his usual missionary tour, though because of his bronchitis he did not again venture away from home during the winter. But this was the last time he was compelled to do so, as succor for his old age arrived from an unexpected quarter.

Holyoake, though still an unshaken champion of free-thought, had not forgotten his old friend during the years. In the 1860's Cooper had frequently visited at his house near Regent's Park, where Stopford Brooke, Thomas Allsop, Thomas Hughes, and Herbert Spencer were also occasional visitors.<sup>1</sup> In the final pages of his autobiography Cooper wrote in 1872 with reference to Holyoake:

I call him my friend, for he is my friend still. I never break friendship with sincerity, uprightness, and real nobleness; and these qualities are personified in my friend. If I were to do so in order to please even the religious friends that I love most deeply, I should feel myself to be a contemptible sneak.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the public quarrel between Bradlaugh and Holyoake, Cooper wrote to the latter: "Oh, that these things might drive you to Christ. The whole Christian Church would welcome you and rejoice over you."<sup>3</sup>

But foe of organized religion though he was, Holyoake was capable of real Christian generosity. He was now, in 1881, himself approaching his seventieth year, and in view of his threatened blindness some of his friends were recommending to Gladstone that he be granted a Civil Service pension. Shortly before the application reached its

<sup>1</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, ii: 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, p. 358.

<sup>3</sup> McCabe, Joseph, ii: 354.

final stage, Holyoake wrote to Mr. W. H. Duigan, the prime mover in the matter:

What will you say to me? I have done a thing which disqualifies me from availing myself of the negotiations you so kindly asked Sir C. Foster to undertake on my behalf, and he should be told of it. It must stand over: indeed, be abandoned now. I have been visiting my old friend Thomas Cooper of Lincoln. With bronchitis upon him, he was going out, and has gone out, lecturing and preaching in the inclement weather at 76. He consulted me as to the prospect of a memorial being presented to Mr. Gladstone to place him on the Pension List for such addition to his limited income as may save him from labour beyond his years. Today I have seen Mr. Mundella, who and Mr. Forster are attached friends of his, and I am to draw up the memorial and promote it for him. This will not disqualify me a future day, but I cannot be a candidate myself and do this. Had not my wife been near unto death when I entered into this, I would have come to you to consult you before taking this step. But my friend is more needy than I. Pray forgive me. My wife seems recovering, but is uncertain still.<sup>4</sup>

To Gladstone himself, whom [by the attraction of opposites?] he could count amongst his personal friends, Holyoake wrote in part:

[1881]

My dear Mr. Gladstone:

A friendly accident has made me aware that someone from a generous regard for me, has asked you whether some gift or appointment could be accorded me.

1. After thinking of it I cannot reconcile myself to the idea that you, amid the unusual cares of State which concern the nation so much, and tax your strength which we could ill spare, should give heed to this thing. Should you deem the idea meet on any other ground, please defer it to a distant, less onerous, and more fitting time \* \* \*

2. There is Mr. Thomas Cooper, much older than myself, who from the days of his political imprisonment forty years ago until now has been an honest and brave teacher of working people. I found him lately in Lincoln, going out in his 76th year to preach Christianity to which he is devoted, in inclement weather, because his slender income is too small for his needs. I have drawn up a memorial on his behalf, which Mr. Mundella will in due course place in your hands. Any claims on my account would limit your means of considering his; and that would give me pain \* \* \*

<sup>4</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *op. cit.*, ii: 165.

5. I have always taught self-help and self-reliance with the force of a passion \* \* \* Unless blindness comes again, or decay finds me helpless, I should invalidate what I have taught by accepting public aid \* \* \*<sup>5</sup>

At the next cabinet meeting Gladstone read Holyoake's letter aloud, remarking that he had never before received one like it. In his reply, after thanking Holyoake for his communication, he wrote: I need not, perhaps say more than that it heightens the respect and regard which I have felt for you ever since I have had the advantage of knowing you. I shall examine carefully Mr. Cooper's case.<sup>6</sup>

Following such an inquiry, a grant was made to Cooper of three hundred pounds; Holyoake received nothing either at this time or later. At his suggestion the money was paid to Cooper in three annual installments, lest he should give too large a proportion of it away.<sup>7</sup>

Had Cooper been aware that his application would jeopardize that of his friend, he would certainly never have made it. It seems impossible that he could have known of the application for Holyoake, because of the few who knew about it there was none to tell him about it except Holyoake himself. When Cooper learned of the success of the latter's efforts on his behalf, he at once wrote to Holyoake: "Your spontaneous goodness almost startled me \* \* \* I have always believed in *you*, though not in your unbelief."<sup>8</sup>

As both A. J. Mundella and W. E. Forster had served in Gladstone cabinets, their support of Cooper's application doubtless aided in obtaining its favorable consideration. Indirectly, Holyoake's association with Forster in this matter led to a reconciliation between the two men, who had not been on speaking terms for twenty years.

When, at the end of three years, the government grant ceased, Forster, Mundella, and Charles Seely combined to

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* ii: 165-167.

<sup>6</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *op. cit.*, ii: 168.

<sup>7</sup> Holyoake, G. J., in the *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*, March, 1904.

<sup>8</sup> McCabe, Joseph, *Op. cit.*, ii: 166.

continue the payment to Cooper of £100 a year. Upon the death of W. E. Forster in 1886 his family continued the payments, as did also Colonel Seely after the death of his father.

The erection of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church was decided upon by the General Baptists of Lincoln at their annual church meeting on January 1, 1884. During the previous twelve years Cooper had been a regular attendant at their little church [which stood on the site of the present building] whenever he was in Lincoln. The first subscription to the building fund for a new edifice was for five pounds from Thomas Cooper, and it was partly in recognition of his devoted service to the church that the building was named after him. On the last page of his last work Cooper wrote regarding the new enterprise:

The lowly Christian church of General Baptists in this city [Lincoln], where their predecessors, more than two hundred years ago, were stoned and imprisoned for preaching and practicing immersion baptism—and who have continued to be a poor, and, I had almost said, a despised people—have lately taken courage and set about building a new and more commodious chapel and schools—and have determined to name the place of worship “The Thomas Cooper Memorial Chapel.” I am utterly unworthy of the honor they have put upon me; but they insist upon it that the name will have the desirable effect of inducing many who are not Baptists to subscribe towards the Building Fund. I most heartily wish it may, and will most cordially thank all who send help to the lowly Christian people who so greatly need it.<sup>9</sup>

Substantial subscriptions were received from three Members of Parliament—W. S. Caine, Joseph Cowen, and A. J. Mundella, all Cooper’s friends—and smaller sums from many others among his acquaintance.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, p. 380.

<sup>10</sup> This mission still exists, and under the able direction of Mr. Cecil H. Radford is now carrying on an active religious and social-service work, largely among the poor of Lincoln. I have been told that it is one of the most successful institutions of its kind among the English Baptists. This is due in large measure to the unselfish devotion of Mr. Radford, to whom I have been indebted on innumerable occasions for assistance in the preparation of this biography.

He continued to lecture and travel, principally during the summer, until he was eighty. During the winter he was compelled to give up lecturing almost entirely, because of the regular return of bronchitis, which usually left him again, however, in May.

I am sad [he wrote] when I have to return home in the latter autumn, knowing it is to encounter a solitary winter by the fire-side, with less and less ability to read and write. For my left eye is no longer a working eye, and often prevents the right eye from working effectively: so that I have to shut my eyes, and sit and think, or occupy my mind as well as I can devise.<sup>11</sup>

In 1886, the year when the Home Rule Bill was introduced, Cooper wrote to the secretary of the Liberal Unionist Society in Lincoln:

I shall not vote at the city election because I agree with neither of the candidates. The Tory candidate knows perfectly well that the old Chartist prisoner cannot vote for him. I cannot vote for the Liberal candidate because, so far as my perception reaches, it would be voting in the dark. The Irish people share the common privileges of English, Scotch, and Welsh men. What is it they want besides? I ask the question because they never tell us what they really want. Home Rule is a vague answer, for it may have twenty meanings, and none of them be good. Lately Mr. Gladstone has invented a new phrase—he proposes to give Ireland a 'statutory Parliament.' But what is that, and wherein does it differ from our Parliament? It would only help to make us a more and more divided instead of a United Kingdom. I must declare, whatever offence it may give to some people, that the Irish cry of Home Rule means separation from England, and that would be ruin to Ireland herself, and a costly war for England.<sup>12</sup>

On March 24, 1887 a celebration of Cooper's eighty-second birthday was held, a few days after that event, at Millstone Lane Hall, in Leicester. In honor of the occasion five poems addressed to him were read, most of them the compositions of workingmen. The manuscripts were afterwards forwarded to Cooper at Lincoln, as he had been unable to be present at the festivities, and eventually they were published in a small pamphlet, together with a brief

<sup>11</sup> *Thoughts at Fourscore*, pp. 366-367.

<sup>12</sup> *Times*, July 16, 1892.

sketch of his life; the small publication being dedicated, by permission, to the Reverend Precentor Venables of Lincoln Cathedral, who wrote that he was pleased to have his name associated with that of his esteemed and venerable friend Thomas Cooper.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Balfour, upon the application of Mr. Anthony Mundella,<sup>14</sup> then M. P. for Sheffield, secured for Cooper in 1891 a second Treasury grant of two hundred pounds, "most of which he gave away, leaving only fifty pounds for rent due and funeral expenses."<sup>15</sup>

His old Chartist associate George Julian Harney, in an article composed shortly after Cooper's death, declared:

He was a free giver. He had that quality which is pronounced the noblest attribute of a rich man, but which indulged in by a poor man is accounted little short of a crime. When I tried to raise a subscription for the late John West, a miserable amount of under thirty-five pounds was the result. Of that amount there were two sums of five pounds each. One was from "An Old Chartist"—Thomas Cooper. He requested that I conceal his name for reasons not to be made public.<sup>16</sup>

This same writer shrewdly summed up Cooper's character as follows:

His qualities were commanding, but he had the defect of his qualities—more than one. I am satisfied that no man can succeed in public life without a goodly spice of egoism in his composition \* \* \* A man without egoism, or with but a poor development [of it] may be a good man, a true patriot, but as a public man he will not be successful in any sense, and therefore cannot be counted on to much advance a cause, however righteous and desirable, for mankind's welfare. Nevertheless egoism is a dangerous, though necessary

<sup>13</sup> *Commemoration of Thomas Cooper's Eighty-second Birth-day* \* \* \* [Rev. E. H. Jackson, ed.], Leicester [?], [1887].

<sup>14</sup> It will be recalled that when he was a lad of fifteen, Mundella had enrolled in Cooper's Leicester Chartist Association.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, E. H. in the *Monthly Record of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Baptist Church*, 1904.

<sup>16</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892. In this same periodical nineteen years earlier [September 23, 1873] Cooper made a stirring appeal for an old Chartist supporter, John Morton, then lying ill and poverty-stricken in a Newcastle tenement. As a result of his efforts a sum was raised sufficient to make Morton's last days comparatively comfortable.

gift \* \* \* It was the nature of Thomas Cooper to take to the advocacy of a new cause, and to fraternize with new associates in a spirit of boundless enthusiasm; but it was also in his nature to find out the imperfectibility of supposed ideals, and then to be as fierce in hostility as he had previously been fervent in admiration \* \* \*

Frankly, it was not always easy to "get on" with Thomas Cooper. I might recall, I think, more than one "squall" with our deceased friend. But Thomas had a warm heart. He could be bitter enough when carried away by passion; but he could be as warm in reconciliation as he had been in hostility. A few years ago I called on him at his home in Lincoln. Naturally at first he did not recognize me, though my voice struck him as from a far-off time. His sight had dimmed, and deafness had increased, but on repeating my name he flung his arms around me, combining French fervour with English sincerity.

Thomas Cooper was not well-fitted to be the leader of a party, a league, union, association. He was most useful, and caused and experienced least friction when standing alone. And he only is the free man who stands alone.

I suspect that my old comrade was a disappointed man. First, disappointed in the political conduct of enfranchised workingmen—a disappointment I, too, fully share. When he printed in his Chartist Song Book—

Earth has no beauty to see

Like the broad beaming brow of a Nation when free, he had no anticipation that working-class voters would become the creatures of party election agents. In another matter he was disappointed. He must have felt that his "Christian Evidence" lectures had, in the main, failed to produce any general or lasting effect. \* \* \*

[He] was not the dupe of the prevailing delusion, but [was] sternly devoted to the country's safety, unity, and high standing among the nations of the earth. Thomas Cooper fought the good fight, and repudiating the blandishments of prostitute rhetoric, refusing to minister to any man's inordinate vanity, or to further his unscrupulous ambition, remained steadfast in his allegiance to the country, in devotion to his native land. Honoured be the name and memory of Thomas Cooper. "After Life's fitful fever he sleeps well."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, July 23, 1892.

Though he was not a teetotaler, and kept spirits in the house, his servants never knew him to touch liquor. During Mrs. Cooper's illness, he purchased a few bottles of claret for her from Pratt's Wine and Spirit House, whose proprietor was a personal friend. In his last years he became somewhat fanatical against tobacco,<sup>18</sup> the smell of which he thought made him ill. He never allowed Ash to smoke in the house, and once demanded on pain of dismissal that he give up smoking altogether, but when he found that this would mean losing Mrs. Ash also he did not press the matter further.

During his last years Ash would help him to bed about seven o'clock, and in the morning bathe his eyes, to help his failing sight. When the servant was a little late one Sunday morning because of an unreliable watch, Cooper presented him with ten pounds to purchase a good one, and when Ash got an excellent silver timepiece for five pounds, Cooper bade him use the balance to buy a good watch-chain. A gold watch, which went to his nephew, was the only legacy of any value which he himself had to leave.

Doctor Mitchinson attended him during the last year or two, and upon Cooper's insistence finally sent in his bill for nine pounds, endorsed "If this bill in any way impoverishes you, put it on the fire." But Cooper sent his nephew at once with the money to pay it. Even as an old man he remained "very hasty" as Mrs. Ash tactfully phrased it. One day he put his hand upon her shoulder, and said feelingly, "I wish I had thy patience, Janey."

He went very quickly at the last, having been up every day until the end. On July 13, 1892, he finally consented to lie down on the couch in the afternoon, and immediately

<sup>18</sup> Yet in his last novel he had written with regard to his own indulgence: "But what say I, what do I, when any super-delicate brother cries out, 'Adam Hornbook, abstain from smoking?' I say nothing. I smoke \* \* \* Why am I to be forbidden this harmless and pleasant practice with my pipe? You cannot make it out to be either a sin or a crime, or a transgression of any part of the Decalogue."—*The Family Feud*, Book viii, chap. 1.

fell asleep. The next day Alfred persuaded him to remain in bed, but about midday he insisted upon getting up and being dressed. The following day, Friday July 15, he felt no better, but again was determined to get up. When he proved too weak to allow of his being dressed, he sat up wrapped in blankets. Later in the morning the servants persuaded him to go back to bed. At two o'clock that afternoon he died. Had he lived another two years and seven months he would have been ninety.

The funeral services were held on Monday at the Thomas Cooper Memorial Chapel, which was crowded. The service was conducted by three ministers: J. E. Bennet, pastor of the church; the Reverend Edward Hall Jackson, of Louth, who had edited the memorial of his eighty-second birthday; and his former fellow-prisoner, Arthur O'Neill, of Birmingham. In his memorial address O'Neill recalled how fifty years earlier he had stood with Cooper at Wednesbury before a gathering of twenty thousand striking miners, and said he could still in imagination hear Cooper's ringing voice, and see the immense enthusiasm he evoked from the crowd by his intense sympathy for the poor, and the fearlessness of his denunciation of the oppressors of the working men. The speaker rejoiced that nearly every point which they as Chartists had advocated on that occasion had now been accomplished.

The services were attended by many ministers, several city councillors, and the mayor of Lincoln. At the conclusion of the church service the body was carried out to the organ's playing of the Dead March from "Saul." It was followed by a long procession to the cemetery, about a mile distant, where a large number gathered around the grave. In compliance with Cooper's request, the body was committed to the ground to the reading of the Anglican service, by the Reverend Edward Hall Jackson; his pastor followed with an extempore prayer; and Dr. W. Hillier, of Sheffield, closed the ceremonies with a benediction.

Mrs. Ash was left sole executor, but except for a few pieces of furniture, and some personal belongings, there was no estate. Cooper's reading chair, some marble busts, and portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Cooper are still preserved in Lincoln by his old servants. His clothing and gold watch were given to the son of his half-sister; and his library of nearly four hundred volumes became the property of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church.

Notices of Cooper's death appeared in the *Illustrated London News*,<sup>19</sup> together with a portrait; in the *New York Christian Advocate*;<sup>20</sup> the *Times*,<sup>21</sup> which carried an obituary several columns in length; the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*;<sup>22</sup> the *Open Court* of Chicago;<sup>23</sup> and the *London Spectator*.<sup>24</sup> Of these we quote first from the freethought American publication, and secondly from the conservative English weekly.

General M. M. Trumbull, who had known Cooper personally, when he learned of his death wrote for the *Open Court*:

Two years in Stafford jail, at any time between 1840 and 1845 was martyrdom; and that was the sentence imposed and executed upon Thomas Cooper for blazing a pathway to the House of Commons for Burt, and Burns, and Kier Hardie. A melodramatic part of the romance is the appearance of Mr. Gladstone in the first act, and in the fifth. He was a member of the government which imprisoned Cooper in 1842, and he was on hand with a welcome to the House of Commons for Kier Hardie, tramping into Parliament in the garb of a laborer to the music of the *Marseillaise*. \* \* \*

Thomas Cooper has been called in some obituary notices the last of the Chartists, but that is a mistake. \* \* \* As a Chartist evangelist Cooper did much to arouse the multitude, but he had not the genius to organize it. He was personally brave enough,

<sup>19</sup> July 23, 1892.

<sup>20</sup> July 21, 1892. As this was only three days after the funeral, Cooper's death must have been cable news.

<sup>21</sup> July 16, 1892.

<sup>22</sup> July 23, 1892. In addition to the obituary of George Julian Harney there was an editorial notice, and also reminiscences, apparently by the editor.

<sup>23</sup> August 11, 1892.

<sup>24</sup> July 23, 1892.

but he lacked the \* \* \* tenacity of purpose and opinion which a revolutionary leader ought to have. \* \* \*

Cooper was a philosophical student, always learning, and often changing, but in all his changes he was approved by his own conscience; and therein lies the supreme test of an honest man. Christian, Infidel, and again Christian, in every contradiction he obeyed the injunction of Shakespeare, "to thine own self be true." Although he lived to be eighty-[seven] years old, he was an unfinished man, like the most of us; but unlike the most of us, Cooper had qualities which would have rounded him into completeness, had he permitted them to do so; but whenever the work was almost done he put himself under another discipline; and so, in each of his characters he looks like an imposing edifice without a roof on it. \* \* \* He taught school until he was almost qualified to be a professor, and then he quit. Just on the eve of success as an editor he went to lecturing, and to prison. He taught himself languages and mathematics, but was never considered a great scholar. He wrote well in prose and verse, but never attained the eminent place he might have had in the literature of England. He knew much law, and he proved it in his trial for sedition, but he never became a lawyer. He taught theology, and preached hundreds of sermons, but never was a Doctor of Divinity. He held spiritual sway over thousands of men, and taught them politics, but he never became their captain. The perseverance with which he climbed up, up, to the last round but one of the ladder was wonderful. He was a remarkable man, a famous man, and very nearly a great man.<sup>25</sup>

The *Spectator* said in part:

By the death of the old man who, till a week ago, lived in Lincoln, forgotten alike by the class that looked on him as champion and deliverer, and the class that dreaded him as a revolutionist and anarchist [sic] the Chartist may be said to have become as extinct as the levelers of the Commonwealth. In writing of Thomas Cooper, and in comparing him with the leaders of the people today, we do not think it is fair to assume that the contrast is quite so unfavorable to the men of our own day as it looks at first sight. \* \* \* The men who thought and acted with Thomas Cooper \* \* \* were men of high principles and profound conviction \* \* \* determined not to be befooled \* \* \* by high-sounding phrases, and verbal chimeras. \* \* \* They claimed justice, not indulgence; rights, not privileges. They did not wish to erect the privileges of labour in place of those privileges of birth or wealth which they

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<sup>25</sup> *Open Court*, vi: 3348 [August 11, 1892].

so greatly hated, and so loudly denounced. Self-help, self-control were their watchwords. \* \* \* The race that can produce men like Thomas Cooper—men whom suffering such as the poor endured in the forties, turned not into ruthless Jacobins, but into upholders of liberty and justice—cannot have its virtue wholly exhausted. \* \* \*

It is seldom nowadays that a boy with the real scholar's instinct escapes the eager eyes of the schoolmaster, the clergymen of all creeds, and the ubiquitous philanthropists who are on the lookout to help him help himself. \* \* \* People hardly sleep easily at night if they know of a boy with a real touch of genius in him who is learning to be a cobbler. \* \* \* It was very different in the early days of Thomas Cooper. As he found, it was easy enough to make yourself learned those days, and not get enough help or notice to keep you from semi-starvation. We need hardly say that we think the present plan of getting the exceptionally clever boys scholarships \* \* \* from the grammar schools to the Universities, an infinite improvement. That, however, must not prevent our admitting that there was a heroism about the poor scholar of the past which is not found in the poor scholar of today. \* \* \*

Though, as we have said, Thomas Cooper's heroic struggles to raise himself intellectually, and to learn the things best worth knowing in the world, in spite of all the obstacles that stood in his way, make us admire and respect him, it is impossible not to feel the pathos of a life like his. If, instead of having to pick up his knowledge anyhow and higgledy-piggledy, he had been able to train his intelligence systematically, and to give his mind its rights, he would have made a far greater impression in the world. His independence of view, his sincerity, his ardour for knowledge, might have been made far more fruitful than they actually were. As it was, his mind, like some half-trained animal, was forever beating itself against the bars. He had the mental energy required for great things, but not that mental self-control which it is the grand aim of education to impart. \* \* \* But if Thomas Cooper lacked self-control, he never lacked honesty; and on no occasion did he do or utter aught that was base.\*

On this note we may well leave him. Mistakes Cooper may have made; weakness of temper, of judgment, of execution may be charged against him; but, "On no occasion did he do or utter aught that was base." He would have asked for no better epitaph.

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\* *Spectator*, lxix: 127 [July 23, 1892].

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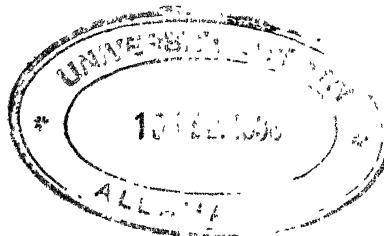
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## VITA

The author of this dissertation was born in Montclair, N. J. in 1890. He studied at Springfield College (B.H. 1921), Clark University (M.A. 1922), Toulouse University, and Columbia University (PH.D. 1935). He prepared the article on Thomas Cooper for the "Encyclopedia of Social Sciences."

